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November 9, 2016

THE Christian CENTURY

Thinking Critically, Living Faithfully

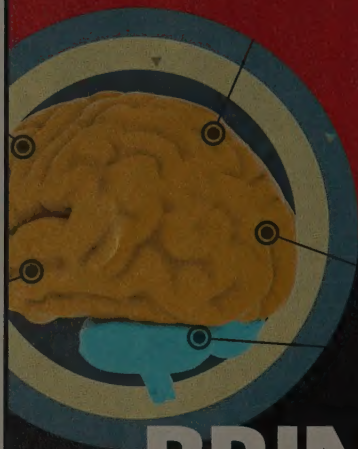
THE opioid CRISIS

The Christian century

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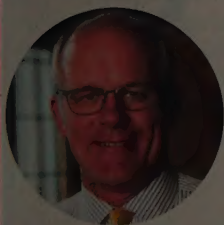
Jennifer Wiseman, director of AAAS Dialogue on Science, Ethics, and Religion

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From the publisher

Peter W. Marty

The truth about lies

Professional truth-seekers are having a rough time with Donald Trump this year. His propensity to tell lies about even his own lies is confounding pundits. He may be duping himself as regularly as he misleads the wider public. Yet cringing at Trump's mendacious ways should not offer the rest of us a pass for overlooking our own capacities for self-deception.

Adam Hearlson's cover story on the opioid epidemic (p. 22) highlights the need for people to be courageously honest in confronting the scourge of addiction. Self-destructive habits receive much of their lifeblood from daily dishonesties. "Ten percent of my battle has to do with alcohol," a friend in recovery likes to remind me. "The other 90 percent is all about honesty." A woman in my congregation who's been attending 12-step meetings for 17 years is fond of saying, "You are always as sick as your sickest secret; and there is no health as long as it remains a secret."

Yet little white lies plague more than the addicted. Small deceptions function like a narcotic in many of us, allowing us to feel nicely respectable to others. In his book *The (Honest) Truth about Dishonesty: How We Lie to Everyone—Especially Ourselves*, Dan Arieli describes different varieties of dishonesty. When we lie and cheat in big ways, he argues, we start to feel bad about ourselves. But smaller versions of untruthfulness leave us with relatively strong self-esteem. In fact, when we manage the moral pluses and minuses in life enough to keep our lives headed in positive territory, we feel mostly wonderful about ourselves.

But what about the truth that is supposed to organize our lives?

When Pilate asks Jesus one day, "What is truth?" the question quietly bounces off the walls. Jesus doesn't say a blessed thing. He just stands there as truth itself—like a full-length mirror revealing the untruth inside anybody courageous enough to take a look.

The Greek word for truth, *alethia*, was sometimes used in ancient times to describe the unveiling of a statue. Think, for example, of being present on the day when Michelangelo removed the covering drape from his *David*. One could walk 360 degrees around this grand figure, inspecting it from every angle. That is *alethia*, variously translated as *unconcealment* or *disclosure*. *Veritas*, the Latin counterpart to *alethia*, shows up in many college and university mottos, though usually in word form rather than as the image of the nude goddess holding a mirror in Roman mythology.

If Hearlson is right in his claim that the avoidance of honest talk in churches is "one of the fees the faithful pay for entry," it might be time for a renewal in understanding liturgical confession. In confessing, we are not informing God of anything God doesn't already know. And we're not just naming a list of transgressions. We're coming face-to-face with a divine mirror of sorts, one capable of disclosing the facade or veil that masks our little dishonesties and self-deceit.

Confession is a beautiful occasion for truth telling. We don't confess our sin in order to be forgiven; we confess because we are forgiven, which is to acknowledge that the cover-up game is over. We're exposed or revealed for who we really are. That's when the joy of living more authentically truly begins.

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November 9, 2016 Vol. 133, No. 23

IN THIS Issue

6 Letters
Carrying guns

7 Refugee resettlement works
The Editors: Why the fearmongers are wrong

8 CenturyMarks
Divide at the polls, a prodigal returns, etc.

10 The ministry of showing up
Kyle Childress: What I learned about racial reconciliation

11 A coalition to impeach
Cláudio Carvalhaes and Raimundo Barreto: How evangelicals helped oust Brazil's president

22 Facing the opioid crisis
Adam Hearlson: Church for those in recovery

26 Evangelically liberal
Jason Byassee: Why Calgary's Hillhurst United Church is growing

32 When pro-lifers were progressives
David Heim: Abortion politics before *Roe v. Wade*

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NEWS

- 14** Priests killed in Mexico as drug violence spirals;
More Nigerian Chibok girls released after two years of
being held by extremists;
Landmark Luther exhibits explore his technological and
theological legacy

IN REVIEW

- 36 Books**
Lillian Daniel: *Sleeping Giant*, by Tamara Draut
Rosemary P. Carbine: *The Name of God Is Mercy*, by Pope
Francis; *Dear Pope Francis*, by Pope Francis
Erica Brown: *Homegoing*, by Yaa Gyasi
Bob Mink: *Aging Matters*, by R. Paul Stevens
- 43 Media**
Beth Felker Jones: Episodes in hell
- 47 Art**
Heidi J. Hornik and Mikeal C. Parsons: *Crucifixion*,
by Giovanni Stradano (1523–1605)

COLUMNS

- 3 From the publisher**
Peter W. Marty: The truth about lies
- 20, 21 Living by the Word**
Calvin Chinn
- 35 Faith Matters**
M. Craig Barnes: What waiting reveals
- 45 Church in the Making**
Carol Howard Merritt: Taking risks to heal hurt

POETRY

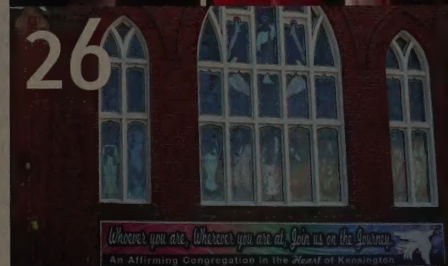
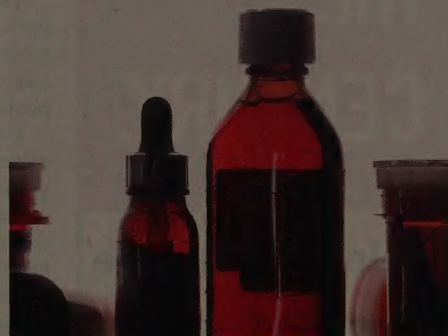
- 12 Julie L. Moore:** Three questions
- 34 Angela Alaimo O'Donnell:** The still pilgrim hears a diagnosis

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LETTERS

Carrying guns

Lindsey Peterson is right—many people carry guns because they are afraid (“More guns, more fear,” Sept. 14). But many of the 13 million holders of carry permits don’t fully appreciate that the principal point in carrying a handgun for self-defense is to kill another human being—one who is threatening you.

I’m a lifelong shooter who has a permit to carry a pistol and a Massachusetts unrestricted nonresident gun license. I can legally own and carry a handgun in public. But I decided not to do so.

Owning a gun for self-defense is a very complicated exercise. You don’t own the gun—it owns you. It dictates what you can say, where you can go, what you have to wear to keep it concealed, and what happens if you display it, much less use it. The last thing you want to do is get into a gunfight. It might save your life, but it can easily get you into a lot of trouble or even killed.

I’m an NRA member for educational reasons but deplore the NRA’s pitch that one needs a gun for self-defense. Having a gun in one’s home presents serious issues.

*James Greer
New Haven, Conn.*

Pipeline protest . . .

The editors ask, “Who pays the price?” (“Whose land, whose oil?” Oct. 12). Blocking pipeline projects like the one in North Dakota hurts the poor the most (including many Native American populations). A lack of transportation causes prices for diesel and gasoline to go up, and the poor are most affected by the increases. Native Americans are particularly hard-hit because reservations tend to be rural, and the inhabitants have long distances to travel.

Local disputes over pipelines are not really waged over specific factual concerns about pipeline safety or efficiency.

Modern pipelines are relatively safe and efficient, especially considering the alternatives of interstate trucking or rail. Rather, these disputes are symbolic protests against hydrocarbon use in general, argued over philosophical issues rather than specific factual concerns about the safety of a specific project.

If we’re going to use hydrocarbon products, we have to move them from where they are produced to where they are used. I suggest that instead of blocking pipeline projects, we ask our governmental agencies to build and run pipelines with proper safety standards.

*Jeff Parkes
christiancentury.org comment*

The Standing Rock nation submitted information to the pipeline company about the area that was off-limits to the building of the pipeline, and the pipeline company chose to ignore the information. How many times will we continue to run over the rights of Native Americans? We’ve done a good job breaking treaties historically and trying to erase the culture of the Native Americans. Maybe it’s time that white people sacrifice something.

*Sue Clark
christiancentury.org comment*

Paul preaching . . .

Aнна Carter Florence could be a postmodern surrogate for the ancient preacher Paul and an invaluable helper to the majority of American preachers today (“Paul’s sermon prep,” Sept. 28).

To stop talking and to take a closer look at everything around you, as well as putting all the observations and insights into the powerful words of the Christian faith—these are invaluable pointers to a credible witness: God.

*B. B. Mequi
Killeen, Tex.*

November 9, 2016

Refugee resettlement works

The world is facing an unprecedented refugee crisis, with 65 million displaced people worldwide. In response, the Obama administration has pledged to resettle more refugees in the United States—an increase from 85,000 in 2016 to 110,000 in 2017.

Critics of this pledge are playing on xenophobic themes to make their pitch in an election year. Donald Trump predicts that we'll see a "flood" of refugees. Thirty governors have demanded that the federal government not send Syrians to their states. In the governor's race in Montana, one election mailer promised that the Republican candidate would "stand up to dangerous refugee programs" and refuse entry to "unvetted refugees."

Much of this reaction is based on a deep misunderstanding of how U.S. refugee resettlement actually works. Three million refugees have resettled in this country since 1975—through a careful, time-tested process that we can be proud of.

Resettlement may be the most difficult way to cross the U.S. border. The screening process can last for more than two years, and refugees are screened through five different federal agencies. Once in the United States, they are helped by a public-private partnership between the government and nine private, nonprofit organizations, including Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services, World Relief, and the International Rescue Committee. These agencies organize community and volunteer support for refugees, and they receive and distribute the onetime funds allocated to each refugee for resettlement.

The success of this approach relies on a great deal of coordinated community and volunteer support. Some critics argue that such a labor-intensive, individualized program means that the United States settles too few refugees; others complain that refugees are thrust on unprepared communities. But the program's reliance on community members is what makes it successful. They befriend and connect with refugees who are struggling with everything from buying laundry detergent to American concepts of time.

Only recently did this process become so politically polarizing. Communities made up of people with diverse political points of view have long understood the importance of the United States' response to global crisis. They've learned that refugee resettlement is a mutually beneficial process and that refugees bring diversity, enthusiasm, and joy to their new communities. Residents respond to new arrivals with generosity, care, and hospitality because they know that the economic and social benefits enrich both residents individually and the community as a whole.

Refugee resettlement works because people overcome fear and reach out to help their new neighbors. Now more than ever we need to support this process and resist the toxic fearmongering of politicians looking to score political points.

The U.S. program's reliance on community members is what makes it successful.

CENTURY marks

PUBLIC, PRIVATE FAITH: Early each morning Hillary Clinton receives an e-mail from Bill Shillady, director of the United Methodist City Society in New York. The e-mails include a scripture text, a devotional commentary, and a prayer. Shillady officiated at Chelsea Clinton's wedding and led a memorial service for Hillary Clinton's mother. Shillady says that the candidate's faith isn't well known, but that although she's reluctant to broadcast it, faith is a daily thing for her (AP).

PUSH BACK: Liberty United Against Trump, a student group at Liberty University, has issued a statement that strongly rebukes university president Jerry Falwell Jr. for his support of Donald Trump. "Trump does not repre-

sent our values and we want nothing to do with him," the statement said. "He has made his name by maligning others and bragging about his sins. . . he is actively promoting the very things that we as Christians ought to oppose." President Falwell responded, "I am proud of these few students for speaking their minds but I'm afraid the statement is incoherent and false" (*Washington Post*, October 13).

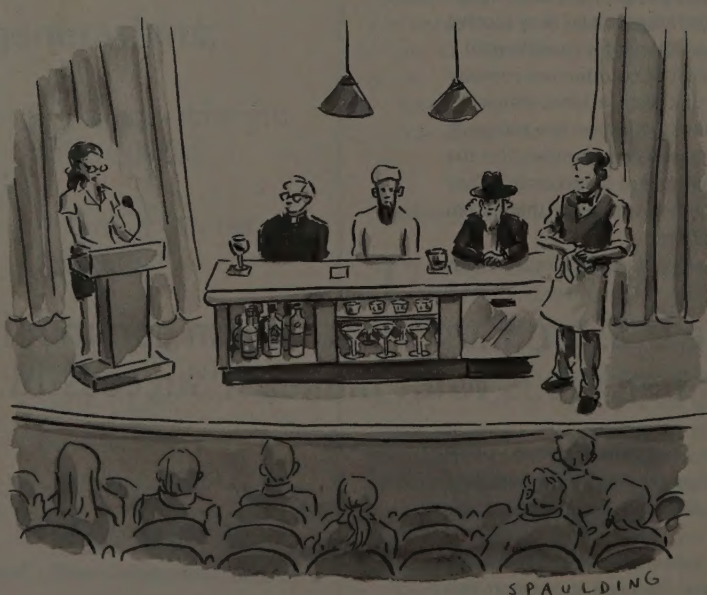
DIVIDE AT THE POLLS: Evangelicals are divided over their choice of presidential candidates. A LifeWay Research poll showed that 45 percent plan to vote for Trump, 31 percent for Clinton, and 9 percent for a third-party candidate. Fifteen percent were undecided. These figures change dramatically when race is

a factor: 65 percent of white evangelicals plan to vote for Trump, while 62 percent of evangelicals of color say they will vote for Clinton (Baptist Press).

PERSISTENT MYTH: The notion that Canadians flock to the United States for major surgery because their health-care system is slow has come up in this election season. The claim is that a single-payer health insurance system like the Canadian one doesn't work. But a definitive 2012 study looked at the medical experiences of 18,000 Canadians; 90 had received care south of the border, and of those 20 had done so electively. Most Canadians would find the American health-care system unaffordable, given their lack of U.S. insurance and the strength of the U.S. dollar (*Vox* October 9).

A PRODIGAL RETURNS: South Africa's Dutch Reformed Church (NGK) once had prime ministers and the ruling white elite in its ranks. Its doctrine was so closely tied to the 20th-century ideology of apartheid that it was sometimes referred to as "the National Party at prayer." Because of this, the church was isolated and ostracized by much of the global Christian community in the late 20th century. When the NGK rejoined the World Council of Churches in June after 55 years, other churches in the country rejoiced at "the return of the prodigal son" (Ecumenical News).

MYSTICAL MINSTREL: This year's Nobel Prize in Literature went to American singer, songwriter, and author Bob Dylan, 75. Scholars of Dylan highlight the religious imagery of his work, from Old Testament references in "All



"Welcome to tonight's panel on interfaith humor."

Along the Watchtower” (1967) and “A Hard Rain’s A-Gonna Fall” (1963), to the New Testament basis of “Gotta Serve Somebody” (1979) and the spiritual yearning of “Thunder on the Mountain” (2006). Dylan seems never to have abandoned the Judaism in which he was raised (RNS).

SPIRITUAL POTION: Oxytocin, the hormone that is secreted during times of love and bonding, may also enhance feelings of spirituality. In an experiment at Duke University, male participants who received doses of the hormone had a greater sense of spirituality than those who received a placebo. This was true regardless of whether or not the participants reported having a religious affiliation. The study defined spirituality as a connection to a higher power or to the universe, one that gives life more meaning (*Huffington Post*, September 23).

TEACHER TURNOVER: A Philadelphia case study reports that while the turnover rate for white teachers has been rather stable at 15 percent since 2008–2009, the turnover rate for black teachers increased from 19 percent in 2008 to 22 percent in 2013 (the highest rate of turnover in any demographic). Teachers of color who leave say they experienced micromanagement and a lack of autonomy in the classroom (*Mother Jones*, September–October).

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM? New education rules announced in China’s Xinjiang Province crack down on parents who encourage or force their children into religious activities or make them wear “extremist clothing.” Parents who disobey the rules are to be reported to the police. The rules seem to be targeting the Muslim Uighur people who make their home in this western province. In recent years the government has been cracking down on underground Muslim schools in Xinjiang, and hundreds of people have died as the result of political unrest (Reuters).

POWER OF GIVING: A conservative estimate concludes that the annual revenue of all faith-based institutions in the United States is \$378 billion—greater

“We need to keep changing the attitude that raises our girls to be demure and our boys to be assertive, that criticizes our daughters for speaking out and our sons for shedding a tear.”
— President Obama on sexism in society and what a feminist looks like (*Glamour*, August 4)

“I’m one among many women sexually abused, misused, stared down, heckled, talked naughty to. Like we liked it. We didn’t. We’re tired of it.”
— Beth Moore, a popular evangelist and Bible teacher, slamming evangelical male leaders for their support of Donald Trump (*Daily Beast*, October 10)

than the combined annual revenues of technology giants Apple and Microsoft. This does not take into consideration the fair market value of goods and services provided by faith-based organizations. Despite declining memberships, the amount religious organizations have spent on social programs has tripled over the past 15 years (*Guardian*, September 15).

KILLING OUR OWN: In modern societies with a police force, a legal system, and strong sanctions against murder, the murder rate is less than one in 10,000 people (0.01 percent). That is a great improvement over lethal violence among humans between 500 and 3,000 years ago, when estimated lethal vio-

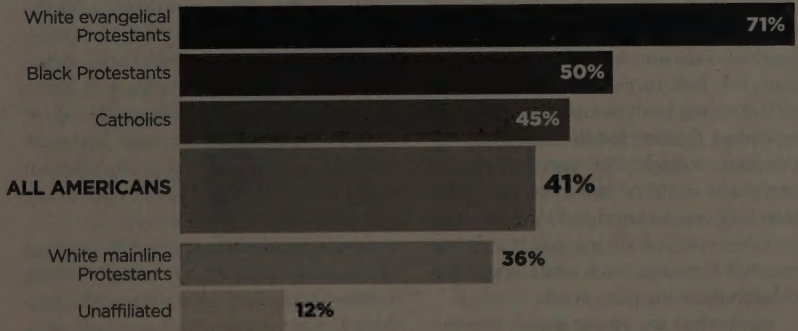
lence was between 15 and 30 percent. Yet compared to other mammals, humans remain one of the most violent species. Humans “come across as both uncommonly peaceful for primates and uncommonly violent for mammals” (NPR, September 28).

PIPELINE TO GOD: Mary Fallin, Republican governor of Oklahoma, called on Christians to observe a day of prayer for the oil and gas industry. The Oilfield Prayer Day gives thanks to God for the gifts of natural gas and oil and prays for families who are suffering due to the loss of jobs in the energy sector. The request for such a day came from the Oilfield Christian Fellowship (ABC News, October 10).

GAY MARRIAGE & RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

SOURCE: PRRI

Percentage of people who say gay marriage conflicts with their religious beliefs



What I learned about racial reconciliation

The ministry of showing up

by Kyle Childress

LIKE A LOT of towns around the country, our town recognizes that we have a race problem. We're asking each other what we can do about it—at least some in our town are asking, and some of us have been asking for decades. A couple of months ago two city leaders, both white men, asked me to lunch and confessed their recognition of racial conflict and their ignorance about what to do about it. I pointed out that since I too was a white male, perhaps I was not the best person to ask. Both blushed and sheepishly admitted they didn't know any black people well enough to ask.

When I first moved here 27 years ago, I attended the local ministerial alliance. I had come to East Texas from an urban setting with a diverse ministerial alliance, and I was unsettled when I saw about 25 white men at the meeting. No one of color was present, and there were no women clergy in town. At one point a pastor asserted, "We represent the spiritual leadership of the city," and I said, "After looking around the room, I'd say that we represent the white male spiritual leadership." It grew quiet until one of the older ministers spoke up. "The black pastors have their own alliance."

When I got back to my study at the church after lunch, I phoned the pastor of our partner church, Zion Hill, a distinguished African-American congregation. We had formed a partnership in 1971 because both churches were full of educators fighting for the integration of our local schools. The partnership had continued, centered mostly on joint worship services. As tepid as I thought these services were, I soon learned that it was unusual for black and white congregations to meet together at all.

Back when the pastor search commit-

tee first called me and invited me to preach and meet the congregation, they also set up a meeting with the veteran pastor of their partner church to talk about race relations in the city. He laughed when I told him I'd stumbled upon an all-white ministerial alliance. He promptly invited me to the black alliance. I accepted even though it met every other *Saturday night*—not a convenient time for a preacher. But I was

young white pastor wanting to work toward racial unity. He said, "Go join black organizations and be a good member. Don't try to be in charge. Over time, if you stay with it and keep learning, you might develop the credibility to lead on occasion, but not at first. Immerse yourself in the black community."

For 27 years that's what I've tried to do, joining the local NAACP, the black ministerial alliance, and attending

In interracial endeavors, I was advised to listen and learn.

committed to working on race relations, so I showed up.

Over the years I've discovered that "showing up" is no small thing, but an essential in race relations. It's not having solutions, making suggestions, or volunteering ideas that counts, but just showing up and taking the time, convenient or not, to show up again and again, volunteering to work, and keeping one's mouth shut and one's eyes and ears open.

When I was a young pastor I thought my job was to blow a trumpet, lead the way, and yell "charge." Will Campbell, radical Baptist and white civil rights activist, friend of John Lewis and James Lawson, taught me that I needed to show up, do what needed to be done, and walk alongside those on the front lines of racial issues. Will opened my eyes to the work of listening and learning.

A couple of years later, while working in Atlanta, I asked C. T. Vivian, Martin Luther King Jr.'s associate and close friend, what advice he'd give me as a

Sunday afternoon black church pastor anniversaries, as well as funerals, barbecues, marches, and prayer vigils and taking racism and white privilege training. I've encouraged my own congregation to do the same, and sometimes they do. We've worked with our partner church, running joint vacation Bible school, working on Habitat for Humanity houses together, and doing literacy work with at-risk children.

A couple of years ago, our two congregations had an eye-opening conversation about how many times members have been pulled over by the police. It was one thing to hear this on the news, but something altogether different when coming from friends we knew on a first-name basis, including teachers and school administrators. Now, when something happens in town or on the news, white

Kyle Childress is the pastor of the Austin Heights Baptist Church in Nacogdoches, Texas, and author, with Rodney Wallace Kennedy, of Will Campbell, Preacher Man: Essays in the Spirit of a Divine Provocateur (Cascade).

members ask themselves what their friends from Zion Hill think about this.

At the same time, our relationship is not easy. Our joint vacation Bible school was a difficult project, with differing expectations, different emphases in theology, and different perspectives on teaching and the discipline of children. After a few years both congregations decided to go back to separate Bible schools. And our two congregations do not mirror one another in our ability to do joint ministries. At times our congregation could barely keep its own doors open, with little time, energy, or resources to do more; at other times their congregation has been in a similar predicament. When one congregation is ready to do something new, the other is not always at a place where it is possible.

A major disagreement among some of the black and white congregations right now is the presence of ordained women.

Our agreement with our partner church is that at their place we follow their protocol and at our place ordained women participate as usual—not a perfect agreement but a starting point. Last year the joint ministerial alliances held an annual Martin Luther King Jr. commemoration service at a leading black church. During the service female clergy were asked to pray or read from the lectern—and not use the pulpit. The service came perilously close to disintegrating when my congregation almost walked out. The situation is still not resolved.

Furthermore, being with one another across racial lines is difficult when the members of all congregations work longer hours, receive less time off, and are too exhausted to show up. It's tough to jointly volunteer on a Habitat house on a Saturday or have a conversation about why we do vacation Bible school differently or about white blindness when

everyone is somewhere else. Resistance to racism is futile when you're so tired that you don't want to get out of your chair at the end of the day.

But we don't give up. Some stains, Howard Thurman said, don't come out without first soaking them. The gospel of the incarnation means that to be with one another across racial lines takes time and showing up. It means persistence and unrelenting patience—but not the patience King decried years ago when he was told to wait as another way of saying “never.” No, this is the patience white people must practice as they give up control and enter into and alongside the black community, seeing what might happen even if it turns out differently than we want. This is the patience of trusting friendships across racial lines enough to disagree with one another, knowing that we're in this for the long haul. Of course, all this assumes we know someone black in the first place. **CC**

How evangelicals helped oust Brazil's president

A coalition to impeach

by *Cláudio Carvalhaes and Raimundo Barreto*

THE IMPEACHMENT of Dilma Rousseff, the first female president of Brazil, has been accurately described as a farce. Brazilian theologian Leonardo Boff termed it “the impeachment of an innocent president.” Sociologist and philosopher Michael Löwy called it a pseudo-legal coup, with many elements resembling the 1964 coup d'état, which led to a dictatorship lasting for 21 years.

The reelection of President Dilma (as she is known in Brazil) in 2014 revealed a political divide. From the moment of her reelection, powerful sectors of Brazilian society decided that

they would not wait for another election and began to work to regain political control from Rousseff's Workers' Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores). Rousseff's predecessor, PT leader Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, had expanded social programs, which lifted 36 million people out of poverty and into the middle class. In response, an opposition alliance was formed involving members of the private sector, traditional political figures, and the mainstream media. Leading newspapers and the television network Globo (one of the most powerful media empires in the world) devoted considerable time and space to reporting on

widespread corruption associated with Rousseff and the PT.

Operation Car Wash, an investigation into corruption initiated in 2014 by the Federal Police of Brazil (it was named after a gas station and car wash operation allegedly used for money laundering), selectively leaked information to the media and became a political instrument used to chastise Rousseff's party and its allies. Though politicians from opposition parties have appeared

Cláudio Carvalhaes teaches at Union Theological Seminary in New York. Raimundo Barreto teaches at Princeton Theological Seminary.

in the investigation, only PT politicians and their allies have been sent to jail. Yet at no moment did Dilma's administration intervene in the investigation. And despite their freedom to scrutinize her administration, investigators were unable to find evidence that Rousseff was involved in any act of corruption.

However, the slowing of the Brazilian economy after successive years of growth deeply affected Rousseff's image. Mainstream media, in conjunction with opposing parties, bombarded the public with news of economic decline, high unemployment, and "international concerns" for Brazil's future. This activity spread the image of a president unable to lead—an accusation easy to make in a society deeply ingrained with patriarchal views. Such efforts helped build support for the impeachment, mostly from the

middle and upper classes who were tired of the alleged socialism of the government—rhetoric promoted by political leaders deeply involved in corruption and trying to save their own political future.

Since Rousseff was not found to be corrupt, her impeachment had to be based on something else. She was accused of unauthorized use of parts of the government budget to pay for social programs. Previous presidents and sitting governors and mayors have often resorted to that kind of move to keep the government functioning. A few days prior to Rousseff's impeachment, a public prosecutor in Brasilia declared that Rousseff had not committed any "crime of responsibility," showing that there were no constitutionally viable grounds for impeachment. In early September, two days after

the impeachment, the same senate that voted to oust Rousseff approved a law changing the limits on the use of supplementary credits, making legal exactly the kind of budgetary decision it had cited to justify her impeachment.

The impeachment process was judicial cover for a political maneuver. On the day of the vote, Senator Acir Gurgacz of the Labor Party explained his vote for Rousseff's impeachment to the press: "There was no crime, but I voted for her impeachment. She lacked political support to continue her mandate." Joaquim Barbosa, former president of the Brazilian Supreme Court, called the impeachment procedures "pathetic."

In an editorial on August 27, *Le Monde* wrote, "If this is not a coup, it is at

Three questions

1.

Along the Beaver Creek,
lobelia clings to the soil,
foiling its every effort
to sneak into the stream,
which ripples over rocks below,
aerating the water that fuels
the wetland where a dragonfly
squints its blue, bulbous eyes,
spying mosquitoes mating,
then steers its body
to reach their next move.
Do you dare, while traipsing
this trail and glancing
milkweed blossoms,
to covet anything
your neighbor may have?

2.

Six months later,
and a mile away,
on a lime-dusted field,
a singular tree,
its leaves shorn
and humming in wind
somewhere south,
waits.

Winter will bear

a crop of snow,
which will deepen
with the season
and wrap around
the stoic oak. No one
will amble by for months.
Driving by, will you
sing your praise
purely from the road's
safe distance?

3.

In between, where there is so much time,
when inspiration won't spread its wings
and raise its crimson head,

when nothing but mud dominates
the wetland, when tarnished tin
is the only color the sky can muster,

what then? Will you savor the age-old scent
of the now-and-not-yet, sense its tension
in the toppled tree, damp and fungus festooned,

as you take each successive step?

Julie L. Moore

least a farce. And the real victims of this policy tragedy unfortunately are the Brazilian people.” Many international voices have denounced the undemocratic maneuver to take down an elected president in the largest Latin American country.

The Brazilian oil company PETROBRAS has been at the epicenter of corruption charges, and the struggle for control of giant offshore oil reserves should not be discounted as a factor influencing this process. Whereas PT

ment—such as the Commission on the Statute of the Family—and their projects include finding a “cure” for homosexuality and a definition of family that excludes nonheterosexual persons. In the past few years, FPE has allied with other conservative caucuses (including a powerful rural landowners bloc and the so-called bullet bloc, which lobbies to ease strict firearms control) to advance proposals such as reducing the minimum age of criminal responsibility, punishing doctors who perform abortions, and chang-

is killed every 23 minutes), indigenous peoples (more than 130 indigenous persons are killed by armed farmers in land conflicts every year), and LGBTQ people (according to Transgender Europe’s Trans Murder Monitoring Project, Brazil is the country with the highest rate of murders of LGBTQ persons in the world).

The Brazilian National Council of Churches, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in Brazil, the United Presbyterian Church, and the Alliance of Baptists of Brazil have unequivocally condemned Rousseff’s impeachment and warned about the neoliberal agenda of the incoming administration and its impact on the poor and marginalized groups.

Some of the most vocal politicians in favor of Rousseff’s impeachment were evangelical leaders.

administrations wanted to keep exploration of “pre-salt” oil reserves—the oil lies under domes of salt—mostly under the control of the Brazilian government, the opposition, in conjunction with the Brazilian congress, aims to sell operation rights to multinational companies without much regulation or accountability. Latin America has a long history of colonial and neocolonial alliances involving local elites and foreign political and economic interests, and there have been concerted efforts to topple left-wing governments in the region. Considering this, the ousting of President Rousseff and the attempt to dismantle the Brazilian left are not isolated events.

Some of the most vocal politicians in favor of the impeachment were evangelical leaders. In 2010, 44 million Brazilians, or about 22 percent of the entire population, identified themselves as evangelical or Protestant, and that growth has led to political influence. Neo-Pentecostals have led the evangelical boom and have uniquely contributed to the development of an evangelical political ideology.

The Frente Parlamentar Evangélica, one of the most influential caucuses in the Brazilian parliament, exemplifies that ideology. Politicians elected by large evangelical constituencies occupy important special commissions in the parlia-

ing the demarcation of indigenous lands. Together these groups consistently blocked any proposal Rousseff sent to the Congress for two years, bleeding an already weakened administration to death.

Jair Bolsonaro—a member of Congress often referred to as the Brazilian Trump—honored the colonel who tortured Rousseff when she was a part of a guerrilla political movement in the 1970s. Bolsonaro, recently baptized by an evangelical pastor in the Jordan River, already has supporters for the 2018 presidential election.

But Brazilian evangelicals are not homogeneous. Over the past two decades many progressive evangelical voices have emerged, including Evangelicals for Justice, Missão na Íntegra, Rede FALE (SPEAK Network), the progressive evangelical movement, and the black evangelical movement. This progressive evangelical minority has joined ecumenical Protestants and progressive Catholics in opposing torture, racism, sexism, misogyny, and human rights violations.

Such agendas are extremely relevant in a society that continues to be particularly unjust and violent for women (a woman is killed in Brazil every two hours and assaulted every 15 minutes), black youth (one young black Brazilian

Though unwarranted, the impeachment of Rousseff was to some extent a self-inflicted wound by her government. The successful reforms that led to expanded social programs were not accompanied by structural political reforms. Colonial roots of power and social relations remained untouched, making it easier for oligarchy to assert control. Furthermore, Rousseff appointed neoliberal economists and politicians to first-rank positions, placing her administration in the hands of those who eventually betrayed her. Frei Betto, who worked in the Lula administration, has said that “not a single fundamental reform—agrarian, tributary, political, social security, education, health—was done. The inequality between rich and poor remains obscene. PT exchanged a project for a new Brazil for a project of power.” Lula himself has been charged with negotiating oil contracts to benefit his family.

For now, the political project aimed at turning Brazil into a country for everyone has been frustrated. Now is the time to turn back to popular movements and networks formed by those who continue to resist the politics of revenge and intolerance on a daily basis, regardless of the success of grand political projects. As Brazilian musician Gilberto Gil sings: “Our love is like a grain / seed that needs to die in order to flourish.”

CC

Priests killed in Mexico as drug violence spirals

Even in a community that has grown accustomed to the news of brutal killings, the abduction and murder of a popular Catholic priest in rural Mexico created shock and outrage.

The bullet-ridden body of José López Guillen was found earlier this fall on the highway outside Puruándiro in the western state of Michoacán, a region plagued by violent conflict. The 43-year-old cleric had been abducted from his home in nearby Janamutato five days earlier.

"He was an engaging personality," said Maria Solorio, a regular at López's church. "He was an excellent priest and very devoted to the community. . . . What happened to him was a great injustice."

Such injustices have been piling up and have prompted questions about whether the church is under attack or whether the clergy are just collateral damage in a wider wave of violence.

The same day López was kidnapped, authorities discovered the bodies of two slain priests in the eastern state of Veracruz. In total, at least 15 priests have been slain over the past four years.

In the wake of the killings the church has also abandoned its normal reluctance to criticize the government and has publicly accused state officials in Michoacán and Veracruz of directing a defamation campaign against the priests.

Mexico has the second-largest Catholic population in the world, with nearly 100 million people, or more than 80 percent of the population, identifying as Catholic. But the country has a long history of anticlericalism, and in the past century the government officially and often violently suppressed the church.

That dynamic changed dramatically after constitutional reforms in 1992, and the government and the Catholic

hierarchy enjoyed good relations for the most part.

Motives have not been established for the latest killings, but the Centro Católico Multimedial (Catholic Multimedia Center) notes that violence against clergy occurs disproportionately in states with high levels of organized crime, such as Veracruz and Michoacán.

The organization records 31 killings of priests in Mexico since 2006, the year then president Felipe Calderón deployed troops to Michoacán in an effort to stamp out the drug cartels.

A decade later, the war across Mexico has claimed more than 150,000 lives and thousands more are missing, while Michoacán remains a hotbed of crime and civil unrest.

Pope Francis visited the state capital,

Morelia, during his trip to Mexico in February, in a show of solidarity with those most affected by organized crime.

The intensity of the violence in Michoacán has compelled some priests to engage in social activism, although the moves are rarely welcomed by the Catholic hierarchy.

One such priest is José Luis Segura Barragán, who is among the most high-profile opponents of drug cartels in the state.

After he was appointed parish priest in the town of La Ruana in 2013, Segura voiced support for the armed self-defense groups that had sprung up in response to rampant insecurity in the region. Other groups of locals soon tried to drive him out of town.

"Because I didn't leave, people fired



VIOLENCE AGAINST CLERGY: Weapons seized from criminal gangs are displayed before being destroyed by personnel at a military base in Tijuana, Mexico, on August 12. Mexico's violence has been increasing in recent months, including the murder of several priests.

bullets and threw rocks and fireworks at the church," he said.

Segura, who finally left La Ruana four months ago, came under the media spotlight for his views. Yet for the clergy, even keeping a low profile is no guarantee of safety. In the most dangerous states in Mexico, any resistance against cartels, however minor, can become a motive for murder.

"Priests find themselves in problems when they refuse to provide a service to drug traffickers, like a baptism or mass," Segura said.

Analysts generally agree, however, that violence against the clergy should be seen within the wider context of the drug war.

"It would be dishonest to say this is a targeted persecution of priests or the church," said Hugo Valdemar Romero, a spokesman for the Archdiocese of Mexico City. "But the fact that you are a priest does not liberate you from the risk of robbery, murder, or torture."

Omar Sotelo of the CCM said the role of the clergy makes them particularly vulnerable to crime, since priests come into contact with a great variety of people, some of whom may be criminals.

"The violence against priests often has to do with their pastoral work," Sotelo said. "These are not just common crimes."

Some critics have accused Mexican bishops of concentrating on social matters such as same-sex marriage while turning a blind eye to the politically sensitive topic of violence.

"The church is focused on sexual issues," said Alejandro Solalinde, a priest and activist. "They don't organize many marches to protest injustice, government corruption, and impunity."

But attempts by prosecutors to link recently murdered priests with crime and criminals seem to have convinced church officials to speak out against the government.

Surveillance footage apparently showing López entering a hotel with an underage boy was leaked to a media outlet in Michoacán. It caused an uproar until a woman on social media identified the pair as her ex-husband and son, not the murdered priest.

Similarly, Luis Ángel Bravo Contreras,

state attorney general, was criticized for claiming the two priests in Veracruz had been drinking heavily with their killers before the crimes.

Church officials have responded with a vigorous defense of the victims.

On September 26, a day after López's body was discovered, the Mexican bishops' conference made a statement demanding an end to slander against priests or anyone, especially during investigations.

Slander, Solalinde said, "is a common strategy . . . to criminalize victims in an effort to contain the public outcry."

In this Mexican context of crime, corruption, and impunity, Solalinde believes violence against priests suggests they are truly living their vocation.

"This persecution is a sign that priests are defending human rights," he said.

Solalinde has himself been threatened by criminals on multiple occasions.

"If one day something happens, it happens," he said. "But I refuse to let that worry me." —Stephen Woodman, Religion News Service

More Nigerian Chibok girls released after two years of being held by extremists

Families reunited with 21 of the 276 Chibok schoolgirls kidnapped by the terrorist group Boko Haram after they were released in mid-October to the Nigerian government.

In the time since militants captured the girls in April 2014, some escaped their captors and made their way home, while others were liberated by Nigerian forces. This is believed to be the largest group released by Boko Haram since the initial kidnapping.

Nearly 200 of the girls, however, are still missing. But the release of so many through negotiation provides a glimmer of hope for their families.

[Most of the girls' families are part of the Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria (the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria). Many of the girls' parents were killed, according to Rebecca Dali, executive

director of a nongovernmental organization working with EYN.]

Presidential spokesman Mallam Garba Shehu wrote that the girls' release was "an outcome of negotiations between the administration and Boko Haram brokered by the International Red Cross and the Swiss government. . . . The negotiations will continue."

In September, the Nigerian government sought help from the United Nations for negotiation with the group in response to Boko Haram's expressed willingness to release the girls in exchange for captured leaders of the terrorist organization.

Boko Haram has made a reputation as one of the most dangerous terrorist groups in the world, though it was largely ignored by the West until the kidnapping of the Chibok girls caught international attention, spurring headlines and the social media campaign #BringBackOurGirls.

Since then, Boko Haram has split, with the main arm renaming itself Islamic State West Africa Province and declaring its allegiance to the self-proclaimed Islamic State extremist group. The portion of the original group that still calls itself Boko Haram holds the Chibok girls and is not affiliated with the Islamic State.

The large release may be a result of increasing willingness to negotiate as Boko Haram loses ground in the Sambisa Forest, where the group is headquartered. The Nigerian military has been conducting numerous raids on their territory, rescuing several other Chibok girls in the process.

However, reports from the Nigerian military have often overstated their success against the group. For example, the military has repeatedly declared that they have killed Abubakar Shekau, the leader of Boko Haram, only to have him show up alive and well in later propaganda videos.

Violence related to Boko Haram has displaced more than 2 million people and left 4.5 million needing food aid in recent months, according to the UN World Food Programme.

But progress has been made against the terrorist group, and the liberation of 21 girls is a big step toward the goal of bringing the rest of the Chibok girls

back, as well as other captives of the organization.

"I can only weep, right now," Obiageli Ezekwesili, one of the leaders of the #BringBackOurGirls movement, wrote on Twitter in response to the news. "You know that kind of cry that is a mix of multiple emotions. Lord. Some of our girls are back!" —Weston Williams, *The Christian Science Monitor*

Landmark Luther exhibits explore his technological and theological legacy

Three interconnected U.S. shows, taken together, represent the most extensive display of Martin Luther-related materials ever collected outside of Germany.

The exhibits run through mid-January. One at the Minneapolis Institute of Art focuses on the cultural and historical context of the Protestant Reformation. Another at Emory University in Atlanta examines the debates over law, grace, and salvation that animated Luther and his followers.



LASTING LEGACY: One of the objects in three interconnected U.S. shows about Martin Luther is a 1529 oil on panel portrait of him by his friend and neighbor, Lucas Cranach the Elder. The exhibits display a larger collection of Luther-related materials than any outside of Germany.

Word and Image: Martin Luther's Reformation at the Morgan Library in New York City features an iconic portrait of Luther by his friend and neighbor in Wittenberg, the artist Lucas Cranach.

There's also a wooden money chest used by Johann Tetzel, a Dominican friar who gained infamy for taking payments in exchange for granting indulgences, or remissions of punishment for sin.

But the centerpiece of the New York exhibit is a set of documents associated with Luther and his remarkable ability to communicate with the wider populace. There are his translations of the Bible from Latin into the German of the day, as well as Lutheran hymnals and Luther's 1521 letter to Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, in which Luther stood by the theological views that were earning him both renown and powerful enemies.

The real jewel is a single-page print of the 95 Theses that Luther nailed to the door of a Wittenberg church, one of just six contemporaneous copies in existence.

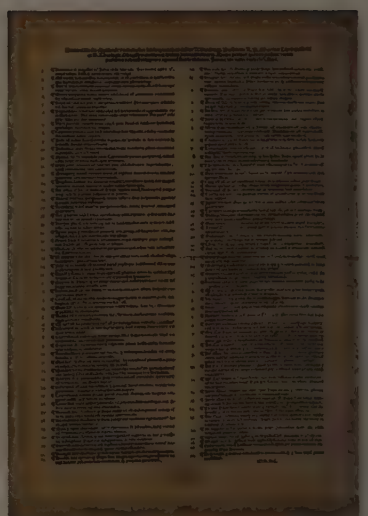
That even these few copies survive is a small miracle, said John McQuillen, who curated the exhibition. Wittenberg was a university town, and the church doors "were the bulletin board of the university," he said, where it was standard practice to post a notice of a debate and the points that you wanted to argue.

"I don't think it was this dramatic moment of the sound of the hammer ringing across Germany," McQuillen said. "It was another day at the university, and another lecture to be held."

No one knows if Luther actually posted a printed copy like the one on display here, or if it was handwritten. If it had been a written version, it would not have been considered worth saving, nor would it have survived. Handwritten copies were cast aside as a matter of course once a printed version was available; a written original was considered of no value until modern times, and no one at the time realized the impact that these 95 Theses would have.

Even these famed theses may not have been as important as the world has come to believe.

They were, after all, written in Latin and intended for a university audience of theologians. What really had an impact was a sermon on many of these same topics—indulgences and grace and cor-



RARE JEWEL: One of the six extant copies of Martin Luther's 95 Theses is among the objects at an exhibit in New York City. The printed broadside points to the Reformer's use of technology to spread his message.

ruption in the church—that Luther delivered a short time later and had printed up and distributed.

That sermon arguably had a much greater effect on the wider public and marked the start of Luther's career as an astonishingly proficient writer, publishing a sermon or pamphlet or book on average every three weeks up until his death in 1546.

Movable type printing—invented in Europe six decades earlier by Luther's fellow German, Johannes Gutenberg—was gaining steam as an industry, and Luther and the popularity of his ideas gave printers an enormous boost.

McQuillen stressed that the success of the Reformation was really the result of a kind of "perfect storm" of conditions as much as Luther's theological concepts. Sentiment in Germany was already growing against the church's corrupt practices, as was resentment that so much money was going to Rome instead of staying closer to home.

In addition, local princes were looking for more autonomy and were willing to protect Luther when the forces of church and empire were out for his head, a campaign that also brought Luther fame and more grassroots support.

But it was the combination of a new technology and a new theology—and, as McQuillen said, “someone who knew that message had to get out with little short texts that were very understandable to the average reader”—that made the difference.

Luther, working with Cranach and his shop of painters and engravers, was also able to distribute mass-produced woodcut images that mocked the pope or showed charity workers in a positive light.

“He took the message to the people: it is like 16th-century tweeting, throwing out these little pamphlets, these little single-page tracts, and almost poster prints of eye-catching woodcut illustrations,” McQuillen said.

It was as big a shift as the transition 1,500 years before Luther from scrolls to bound codex, and it changed the Western world, religiously, politically, and culturally.

“We are on a continuum of media; this is not something that was just invented with Facebook and Twitter,” McQuillen said. “We perpetually revisit the way that information gets out, how and what it is. And the fact that we are still dealing with the same problems and issues that they were dealing with 500 years ago is very telling to how important this subject matter is.”

Luther’s life “is almost ridiculously relevant today as to how a grassroots movement gets going and actually can change something,” McQuillen said. —David Gibson, Religion News Service

Methodist agency leaves NYC as other institutions face rising property costs

When Betty Thompson arrived in New York City in 1950, she soon got a job with the Methodist Board of Missions on Fifth Avenue in a stretch she called “Protestant Rome.”

Ten blocks of the avenue were home to several mainline groups, including Presbyterians, Baptists, and a World Council of Churches office. A decade later, when the Interchurch Center—originally called the Protestant Center

and later nicknamed the God Box—opened across from Riverside Church, several denominational and interdenominational groups moved there. The Methodist mission board was one of the original tenants.

“We all dwelt in ecumenical harmony,” Thompson said. “It was kind of the heyday of the ecumenical movement.”

Now the mission board’s successor, United Methodist General Board of Global Ministries, is relocating to Atlanta, after nearly two centuries of Methodist global missions based in New York City.

John McCullough, who heads Church World Service, one of the ecumenical partners at the Interchurch Center, and is a former Global Ministries employee, said, “It is this agency that brought some of the most important voices of the 20th century into this building to bring witness to a world that in many ways experienced brokenness and a sense of hopelessness.”

While the move is being completed in early November, the Atlanta headquarters is already in operation. Some New York staff, including 39 support staff, were not invited to move. United Methodist Women remains at the Interchurch Center.

The American Bible Society, which for most of the 20th century was associated with Protestant ecumenism, also reduced its staff when it sold its building and moved to Philadelphia in 2015 after nearly 200 years in New York City.

The National Council of Churches relocated its headquarters from the Interchurch Center to Washington, D.C., in 2013. In the past three years the organization has run large budget surpluses and doubled its reserves, NCC staff said.

Other national ecumenical organizations that remain in the God Box include Church Women United and Ecumenical News. And several mainline denominations have an office there, such as for a pension board or foundation.

Some of the institutions staying in the city have made deals with real estate developers to get funds to keep up older buildings.

Park Avenue Christian Church, which is affiliated with the Disciples of Christ and United Church of Christ, celebrated its 206th anniversary on October 10. The congregation recently sold property and

development rights for a high rise, which includes an annex for the church “as well as funds for upkeep of the sanctuary built in 1911 inspired by La Sainte-Chapelle in Paris,” Disciples News Service reported. The building is considered an architectural landmark.

The amount of money the congregation received through the development deal is confidential, church staff said. The *Wall Street Journal* reported an estimate of nearly \$25 million in funds for the church.

Union Theological Seminary could raise more than \$100 million to make its aging stone buildings safe by selling development rights to a contractor planning to construct high-rise condominiums on campus. The plan sparked protest from some students, faculty, and alumni concerned about the lack of affordable housing or union labor in the project. Administrators and prospective developers met with students and alumni in October to give more details about the deal, which had not yet been finalized.

“If Union decided not to do this, it would simply mean that eventually our whole campus would be sold to a developer who would come along and do it,” said Serene Jones, Union president, told the *CHRISTIAN CENTURY* in January. “Better that we, in the midst of this environment, use our assets for the sake of our own future.” —Linda Bloom, United Methodist News Service; the *CHRISTIAN CENTURY* staff



THE GOD BOX: The Interchurch Center, located across from Riverside Church in New York City, earned its nickname because of the number of denominational and ecumenical groups with offices there. This fall the United Methodist General Board of Ministries became one of the latest organizations to relocate its headquarters.

PHOTO BY BRIEZY VIA CREATIVE COMMONS LICENSE

Survey: Americans accept contraception, divide over LGBT rights

When it comes to contraception, a clear majority of Americans say employers should be required to cover it in their health-care plans, even if they have religious objections.

But a recent survey by the Pew Research Center reveals a sharp division on another hot topic: whether wedding service providers should have to serve same-sex couples. And Americans also disagree on whether transgender people should have to use the public restroom of the gender assigned to them at birth.

“What doesn’t surprise me—but is, I think, the biggest news in terms of the value of the research—is the deep divide in this country is more basically theological than anything else,” said Albert Mohler, president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

For Mohler, Pew’s findings on religious liberty “have almost everything to do” with whether a person attends church services regularly.

The survey, titled *Where the Public Stands on Religious Liberty vs. Nondiscrimination*, shows that those who attend religious services weekly are more likely to hold traditional moral views on matters raised in the study.

By contrast, Kelly Brown Douglas, a theologian at Goucher College and the Washington National Cathedral, said the survey reveals Americans’ attitudes toward discrimination.

She said it is discriminatory to force transgender people to use a bathroom that does not correspond to the gender with which they identify, just as it is discriminatory for a business to refuse to provide a service for a same-sex couple’s wedding.

“We’ve often seen throughout our history that people have used religion to try to legitimize discrimination of other human beings,” Douglas said. “If we waited for the polls, we would still have Jim Crow.”

In designing the survey of 4,538 adults, which has a margin of error of plus or minus 2.4 percentage points, Pew researchers set out to test Americans on

matters that have forced courts to weigh religious liberty versus other constitutionally guaranteed rights.

“It’s interesting to see that so many Americans are in agreement about the question about the provision of birth control in employer-provided health care,” said Jessica Martinez, a Pew senior researcher. “You see a lot more division on the other two topics we asked about,” which were transgender people’s bathroom use and wedding services to same-sex couples.

But is the broad agreement on contraception—and the lack of it on wedding services and transgender rights—so surprising?

Most Americans, Pew researchers point out, accept birth control. Just 4 percent consider it immoral. Americans are far more divided, however, on homosexuality, the poll also finds. While 62 percent say homosexuality is morally acceptable or not a moral issue, 35 percent say it is morally wrong.

And while a large majority of Americans (87 percent) say they know a gay or lesbian person, only three in ten say they know a transgender person. Knowing a transgender person is closely linked with the belief that the person should be able to use the restroom of his or her choosing.

Mohler asks whether the agreement on the birth control question would have emerged had the pollsters considered the nature of many of the objections to the Affordable Care Act’s contraception provision—the context for much of the recent controversy on the issue.

Objections to the provision, he pointed out, mostly did not relate to the required coverage of birth control per se.

Rather, some Christians objected only to covering those birth control methods that they consider abortifacient. On this issue, the Supreme Court in 2014 ruled in favor of the evangelical Christian employer in what became known as the Hobby Lobby case.

If a question about contraception had explored that specific objection, the response may well have been different, Martinez said. “The question we asked was much more general.”

The survey also found that on these questions of religious liberty and discrimination, most Americans had little sympathy for opinions that differed from their own.

—Lauren Markoe, Religion News Service

Few pastors asked to perform marriages for same-sex couples

A survey shows that since gay marriage was made legal in 2015, Protestant pastors have rarely been asked to officiate at such ceremonies.

More than 100,000 same-sex weddings have occurred since the Supreme Court ruling. But only 11 percent of senior church pastors, both mainline and evangelical, report having been asked to perform such a rite, according to a poll by LifeWay Research.

Mainline Protestant clergy were three times as likely as evangelical pastors to have been asked. Presbyterian or Reformed clergy are most likely—26 percent—to have received a request to marry a same-sex couple, while Baptist pastors, at 1 percent, are the least likely.

Pastors 55 and older were twice as likely as their younger counterparts to be asked to perform a same-sex ceremony.

“Most couples, if they want a church wedding, will ask a pastor they know or who they think will support them,” said Scott McConnell, executive director of LifeWay Research. “For same-sex couples, this appears to be an older Presbyterian pastor.”

Researchers for the evangelical research firm based in Nashville, Tennessee, also found that fewer than half of Protestant senior pastors say their churches permit LGBT people to serve, even in limited ways.

Despite the stereotypes of evangelicals being antigay, researchers found that fewer than half of evangelical pastors actually forbid LGBT people from serving in their churches. And mainline pastors, often viewed as LGBT-affirming, were split on whether LGBT people can serve.

Forty-four percent of all pastors surveyed said LGBT people are welcome in “helping or serving roles.” Fewer said they could hold more prominent public positions, such as leadership roles (33 percent), teaching (32 percent), or leading worship (32 percent).

The findings, based on a phone survey of 1,000 Protestant pastors from March 9–24, had an overall margin of error of plus or minus 3.2 percentage points.

—Adelle M. Banks, Religion News Service

People



■ When Margaret Ahmed walks around her hometown of Jos, Nigeria, observing seeds on the ground or plastic bags littering the streets, she sees potential merchandise.

Plants can create natural beauty products, seeds can be beads for jewelry, and plastic bags can be woven into purses, carry bags, and mats. Scraps of cloth turn into beautiful table runners.

Ahmed is the executive director and founder of Home Makers Women Development Initiative, which includes 26 groups in Nigeria, Niger, and Cameroon, with an average of 71 women per group. Christian and Muslim women learn business and money management skills as well as conflict mitigation and mediation.

Ahmed also has been teaching similar skills to youth struggling with drug addictions and to women who sought refuge in Jos after being forced from northern Nigeria by Boko Haram extremists.

The time spent with people coming from similar experiences also provides an informal kind of therapy.

"The needs of these women will only keep increasing," she said. "So you need something to help you make an income so you can meet those needs. You need something to do to give hope."

Home Makers' newest project, Weave of Hope, involves collecting single-serving plastic water bags, used like water bottles and thrown away (see above), to make purses, wallets, and other items.

Pam Shedrach, who was battling a 15-year addiction, has been involved in the weaving program from its inception in 2015. The work helped him stop doing drugs in part by keeping him busy.

"We started collecting used pure water bags with her; it was such a difficult

and degrading task," he said. "Washing, cutting, drying, sewing, weaving them takes real time. But she will not give up."

—Mennonite Central Committee staff

■ She's a plainclothes cop, but on Sunday mornings she wears a uniform: her clergy robe and stole.

Doris Smith, 49, works full time as a Dallas police detective while serving as a part-time licensed local pastor, leading Warren Chapel United Methodist Church in Terrell, Texas.

When not solving cases or working on her studies in the part-time education program for local pastors, she's preaching, teaching, counseling, and visiting the sick.

"With anything you do, it has good and bad, ups and downs," she said of pastoring on top of policing. "Mostly, it's a lot of joy."

Warren Chapel is an African-American church with 34 members, a strong vacation Bible school, an annual women's conference, and a college scholarship program.

Ruby Shaw, a Warren Chapel member, said Smith's police background is an advantage.

"She can counsel with us and tell us a few things about safety," she said. "I appreciate that."

When four Dallas police officers and a transit officer were killed in an ambush in July, Smith was working nearby, and one of the victims was a good friend and former patrol partner.

"In my whole career, that's the worst thing I've ever experienced," said Smith, who is in her 27th year as an officer.

One of the slain officers, Sgt. Michael Smith, was no blood relation, but they had been young officers together.

"I just cried," she said. "He was a family guy: loved his daughters, loved his wife. And he was a church man. He loved God."

She was called to be among those guarding the large crime scene through the night.

"She texted us when she could that she was OK," said Hilda Braggs, a member of Warren Chapel. "I stayed up until daylight watching the news. It was devas-



PHOTO BY SAM HODGES, UNITED METHODIST NEWS SERVICE

tating, and even more frightening because I knew somebody that was in the midst of that."

Despite all that happened, Smith preached the following Sunday.

"I had a lot of support from clergy," who contacted her or came that Sunday, she said. —Sam Hodges, United Methodist News Service

■ Yisrael Kristal, 113, considered by Guinness World Records to be the world's oldest man, celebrated his bar mitzvah 100 years after Jewish boys traditionally mark this rite of passage.

The ceremony took place at his local synagogue in the Israeli city of Haifa in October.

Kristal, who survived the Auschwitz death camp where his first wife died (his two children from that marriage died in the Nazi-controlled Lodz ghetto), was born in Poland on September 15, 1903.

He didn't celebrate his bar mitzvah on time because World War I was raging. His father returned from war only to die a year later. His mother had died three years earlier.

An Orthodox Jew his entire life, Kristal continues to pray every day, his daughter, Shulamit Kuperstoch, told reporters. She said her father's longevity doesn't surprise the family, given his will to survive.

When he was liberated from Auschwitz "he weighed 81 pounds, but he gathered himself, he remarried, he had more children, and he built a new family. And he never once said, 'It's too hard, I'm done, I want to die.' Never."

In 1950, Kristal and his second wife and son immigrated to Israel, where he opened a candy factory. His daughter was born in Israel.

When Guinness World Records crowned Kristal the World's Oldest Man earlier this year, he said he credited God with giving him a long life.

"I believe that everything is determined from above, and we shall never know the reasons why. There have been smarter, stronger, and better-looking men than me who are no longer alive," he said. "All that is left for us to do is to keep on working as hard as we can and rebuild what is lost." —Michele Chabin, Religion News Service

LIVING The Word

November 27, First Sunday of Advent

I AM VERY GOOD at meeting deadlines. So good that in certain situations, it can be a problem. My wife complains that we are always the first to show up at social gatherings. Even when we are intentional about being fashionably late, we still arrive too early.

These essays were due in September, and I met the deadline with time to spare. I began preparing them on July 18, the first night of the Republican National Convention. At the time, the news headlines were dominated by slogans like “Black Lives Matter,” “All Lives Matter,” and “Blue Lives Matter.” Black men had been shot and killed by police officers in Minnesota and Louisiana. Law enforcement officers were shot and killed in Dallas and Baton Rouge. Innocent civilians were massacred in Orlando and Paris. The Rio Olympics produced its share of victories and scandals. The stock market was jittery, employment rates stable. It felt like an extraordinary time. It took place during Ordinary Time.

And now Advent arrives. Like the first wintry storm, Advent abruptly disrupts our lengthy season of Ordinary Sundays. It presents a sharp contrast to the things that have become normal to us. We have settled for our current reality, gotten too comfortable with it. We are dangerously close to accepting the ordinary as normative, and then Advent comes and shocks us.

This week, as on the first Sunday of Advent in other years, the lectionary texts capture this theme of disruption. Matthew cites two figures for judgment: the contemporaries of Noah, and the owner of a house that is about to be robbed. They are not condemned for gross sinfulness. They are judged, rather, for settling too comfortably into business as usual. They seem resigned in their assumption that nothing will change, at least not soon. This assumption brings with it the risk of accepting politics as usual, of accepting lies as truth, of complacency in the face of injustice, of recklessly blaming victims and outsiders. Such a mindset often leaves us completely unaware of the precariousness of our position. So our Advent texts serve their purpose. They shock us out of our complacency, wake us up from our resignation to the status quo.

And it's important to remember, when we read these texts, that Jesus has already come. Advent is often treated strictly as a season of preparation for the birth of Jesus, resulting in the selected texts being read and interpreted in terms of the first

coming. But these are apocalyptic texts—and if we read them that way, they challenge us to expect and prepare for the second coming, the return of Jesus. Yes, the Lord is coming back, and he will not be pleased with everything he finds. The question, in the meantime, is how we will live in these ordinary times.

These texts intend to wake us up, to disrupt our comfortable, ordinary season of life. Matthew reminds us that our current reality—“eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage”—will not put us on the side of the sheep, on the good side of Christ's final judgment. Isaiah's prophecy is shockingly bold: “They shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.” The degree of shock is measured by how deeply our current and ordinary experience of reality has taken root.

This is God's word for us on the first Sunday of Advent. Advent signals the hope and possibility of a fresh start, a resetting of our default mode. It is our born-again experience. Isaiah condemns the royal city of Jerusalem, the locus of national and religious pride. The earth will be transformed from battlefields to gardens, and instruments of war will become tools for production.

I'm writing this in ordinary time, and I don't know who will be our next president. That question will be answered by the first Sunday of Advent. But other unanswered questions hang over us. How many more killings of black people and law enforcement officers will there be? Where will terrorists strike

Advent signals the possibility and hope of a fresh start.

next? Which of our loved ones will suffer illness and die—and who will be born in our midst? Who will lose their job, and who will welcome a new opportunity? What creatures or languages will go extinct? Which nations will find peace and which will engage in new conflict? What environmental disaster will befall due to climate change?

Whatever our circumstance, the Word of God remains the same. So does our resurrection hope, eternal and unchangeable. Advent is about the transformation of our hearts for the way we live our ordinary, everyday lives. This week's Gospel reading comes from a long speech, Jesus's last one in Matthew. At the end of it, Jesus explains with unmistakable and ineluctable clarity that when the Son of man returns, we will be judged on how we tended to the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and the imprisoned.

Reflections on the lectionary

December 4, Second Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 11:1–10; Matthew 3:1–12

MY WIFE HAS an office in a building where one of the tenants periodically discards dried-up orchid plants. They all end up in our home. My wife sees something more in these discarded plants than dead stumps. And sure enough, with care and in time, tiny shoots and buds appear on the dried-up, seemingly dead branches.

Sometimes we treat God's children in similar fashion. This is tragic. They may be the homeless or those with physical or developmental disabilities, discarded on our streets. Racial profiling is another way we treat people as disposable, viewing them with suspicion and behaving accordingly, sometimes with ghastly consequences.

There are plenty of reasons to be fearful these days—we don't need anyone to fan the flames of fear. In a May article in the *Atlantic*, writer Neal Gabler addressed his economic anxieties as a self-described middle-class American. He confessed that if he were faced with a \$400 medical bill or car repair, he would not be able to pay it. According to Gabler, nearly half of Americans would have trouble finding \$400 in a crisis. This produces fear, which in turn leads to a preference for building walls instead of bridges, to blaming and demonizing others as the source of our insecurity. In the face of dried-up stumps we become vulnerable to feelings of helplessness and hopelessness. And so we give up on others and discard them.

Fortunately, reality is not up to us. Whether we are ordinary citizens or candidates for public office, we do not define reality. If there is anything we need to be reminded of time and time again, it is that there is something larger than human beings. I read the Bible for many reasons—for wisdom and counsel, for knowledge, for poetry and stories and myth. But most of all, I read the Bible to be reminded that I should stop trying to think and act like a god.

The Bible is rich with descriptive language for God. One of my favorite examples is the Hebrew word *ruah*, which appears in this week's Isaiah text and is commonly translated *spirit*. It also means *wind* and *breath*. God, like the wind, is unpredictable and beyond human control and management. According to Isaiah, God's spirit intrudes on our present reality and disrupts it—offering new and daring possibilities. "The poet refers to God's life-giving, future-creating, world-forming, despair-ending power and wind," says Walter Brueggemann, "which can create an utter newness." The wind blows over the stump and creates new possibilities.

This election season, both major parties and both presiden-

tial candidates tried to calm the nation's fears. Catchy slogans were designed to inspire hope—from "Make America great again" to "No ceilings, the sky's the limit," from "Law and order" to "When barriers fall, paths are opened to all." The Bible uses the word *fear* not just in the sense of being afraid, frightened, and scared but also in the more important sense of awe and reverence. Paul Woodruff defines reverence as "a sense that there is something larger than a human being, accompanied by capacities for awe, respect, and shame."

This week's Gospel text introduces John the Baptist, who bursts onto the scene preaching repentance. Because of the strange description of how wild John is, we are tempted to dismiss him a bit too quickly. John does not fit the norm of how we picture ordinary people. Like so many other people, he is subject to our prejudicial dismissal. So in appearance as well as in word, John the Baptist preaches repentance—a command to reorient ourselves, to turn from our former ways, to change our attitude and perceptions. And those whose hearts do not change, who lack integrity and character, John indicts as a "brood of vipers," challenging them to "bear fruit worthy of repentance." This is a command to act out of awe and reverence instead of out of being afraid.

Reverence begins with an understanding of our own limitations.

Reverence begins with a deep understanding of our own limitations. "I alone can fix it," says Donald Trump. Woodruff writes: "An irreverent soul is arrogant and shameless, unable to feel awe in the face of things higher than itself. As a result, an irreverent soul is unable to feel respect for people it sees as lower than itself—ordinary people, prisoners, children."

Isaiah's vision of the peaceful kingdom only looks like an impossible dream from the perspective of the arrogant, those who rely solely on themselves and refuse to listen to anyone else. People may see the world as a dried-out plant, a dead stump. God sees the potential for shoots and branches. In our time, they remain mere shoots and branches; much unfinished work remains to be done. As John announces, "the kingdom of heaven is near"—near, not here.

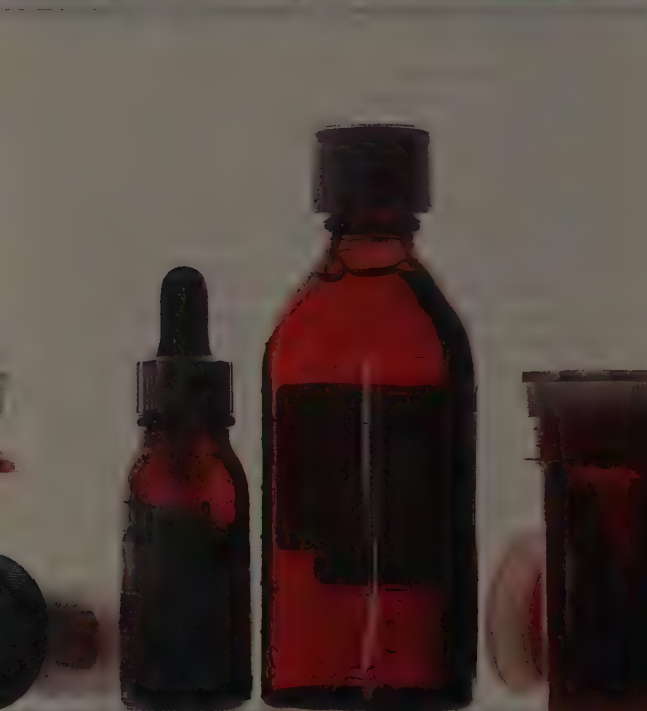
As for the rescued orchid plants in our home, my wife gives most of them away to family and friends. The few we do keep grace our home, adding beauty and hope.

The author is Calvin Chinn, a congregational consultant who lives in San Francisco.

CHURCH FOR THOSE
IN RECOVERY

Facing the opioid crisis

by Adam Hearlson



WHEN JANICE FORD was called to be rector of the Church of the Reconciliation (Episcopal) in Webster, Massachusetts, she had no idea that in a few years she would be vacating her office in order to make room to house men in recovery.

Adam Hearlson teaches preaching and worship at Andover Newton Theological School.

Like many small cities across the country, Webster has had an opioid epidemic and few resources for responding to it. With moving boxes strewn about her office, Ford recalls how she began her ministry to addicts and those in recovery. "At the time I arrived, I wasn't thinking that this would be our ministry. It just sort of evolved."

Ministry in a local jail combined with an intensive educational program in addiction and recovery opened Ford's eyes to the needs of an ignored population.

Over the past two years, Ford and the church have been creating the Reconciliation House, a house for men in recovery who are leaving the jail system and either cannot or will not return to their former living situations.

"They have no place where they can go and be confident that they can maintain their sobriety," Ford tells me. "In some cases they are going back to the street. In some cases they are going back to a home situation that is less than optimal. Many of these young men have parents who are alcoholics and addicts. It is very hard to stay clean and sober in that environment."

In Webster, local industry dried up long ago and white-collar wealth migrated to the suburbs. The scarcity of opportunities for upward mobility is inversely matched by the easy access to drugs. Where once a drug like heroin could only be bought in Boston or Hartford, now it is found on the streets of Webster.

Recently Ford received an e-mail from a local doctor informing her about the presence of bad heroin across the county. Over one weekend, the e-mail read, 12 people showed up at the hospital having overdosed on bad heroin laced with Fentanyl.

Last year, the leading cause of accidental death in the United States was drug overdose. In 2015, 47,055 people died of drug overdoses, and nearly 30,000 of these were caused by opioids. In Massachusetts, four and half times more people die by drug overdose than by car accident, and nearly 1,700 infants were born last year exposed to drugs. Both of these tragic phenomena can be traced to the opioid epidemic facing the state.

Ironically, the opioid crisis in America began with what seemed to be a solution to one of medicine's most ancient problems: pain. Pain has always been a part of medicine, and doctors, shamans, and healers of all kinds have been tasked with alleviating it. Anyone who has stared into the eyes of a person in acute pain and seen that person willing to sacrifice any relationship, any amount of money, any extraneous body part for relief knows the power of pain. Doctors see this pain every day, and every day they encounter supplicants begging for help and a few more pills.

Since the Assyrians began extracting goo from the bulb of the poppy, the world's most effective and widely used painkiller has been the morphine molecule. Ancient Egyptians discovered its medicinal properties, Homer and Virgil wrote about potions made from opium, Arab traders spread it across the world, and in the early 1800s Friedrich Sertürner isolated the morphine molecule from opium and named it after the god of sleep, Morpheus. Morphine's use over the past 300 years has been spread by war, and in turn, national dependence on opium has led to armed conflicts around the world. Human his-

tory has not known a time when the morphine molecule was not valuable. The current national dependence upon opioids is just another chapter in the history of the world's complex relationship with the drug.

In his 2015 book *Dreamland: The True Tale of America's Opiate Epidemic*, Sam Quinones begins his description of opioids with the story of a medical system that saw pain prevention as a moral good. In the 1990s, the meager pain treatment practices of the previous generation were seen as inhumane. An ethical mandate to prevent pain was joined to research that suggested that patients with chronic pain have low risks of opioid addiction.

Last year, nearly 30,000 of 47,055 drug deaths were caused by opioids.

Meanwhile, pharmaceutical companies began marketing new time-released opioids as effective and nonaddictive treatments for chronic pain. The most popular of these was OxyContin. Produced by Purdue Pharma, OxyContin was marketed as a 12-hour time-released pain treatment. Posters touting OxyContin read, "Remember, effective relief just takes two." OxyContin was ready for market in 1996. Purdue's marketing strategy aggressively promoted OxyContin as a wonder drug, and it courted doctors with all-expenses paid trips to conferences in exotic locations.

The early research indicating nonaddictive properties turned out to be wrong. According to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health, nearly 7 million people have abused OxyContin since its inception, while Purdue Pharma has made over \$31 billion of revenue from the drug. From 1999 to 2008 the prescription of opioid painkillers grew in parallel with the rise in opioid abuse and accidental opioid overdose. According to one study, 259 million prescriptions were written in 2012 for opioids, which is enough to stock every medicine cabinet in this country a few times over. By this time, a new industry had been built to meet the growing demand, "the pill mill."

As Quinones puts it, "a pill mill was . . . staffed by a doctor with little more than a prescription pad." Pill mills became the easiest ways for addicts to obtain prescriptions for OxyContin and other opioid painkillers like Fentanyl and Vicodin. For the aspiring entrepreneur the overhead was low: some rent, some office staff, and a doctor who was licensed to prescribe Schedule II drugs. These clinics charged a monthly fee from each patient and in turn each patient would walk out with a fresh prescription for opioids.

An investigative report by the *Los Angeles Times* uncovered the story of the Lake Medical pill mill. After hiring a physician, the clinic began prescribing OxyContin at an alarming rate. In a few months, the clinic had prescribed 73,000 pills,

worth nearly \$6 million on the street. Within a year, the clinic's prescription rate had increased to 70,000 OxyContin pills in one month. In order to distribute more OxyContin, Lake Medical began paying homeless people to pose as patients in order to write more prescriptions. Eventually, federal, state, and local law enforcement shut down Lake Medical, and lawmakers across the country have passed legislation to curb the rise of pill mills.

Prescription monitoring programs have become popular among state legislators, and a recent study of Florida's 2010 pill mill legislation revealed that the law saved more than a thousand lives over 34 months. New legislation is making a dent in opioid overdoses, but the lasting effect of pill mills is still felt in the increased rates of opioid addiction in the country.

As aggressive pain care and pill mills created addicts at alarming rates, a new type of drug dealer emerged to meet the growing demand for opioids. Armed with high-powered black tar heroin, a cadre of men and boys from a small town in Mexico began distributing drugs in mid-sized towns across the country. The Xalisco boys, as they came to be known, had a direct pipeline to heroin manufacturing in Nayarit, Mexico, and developed a system of drug delivery that catered to customers.

The Xalisco boys understood that convenience sells, that danger is bad for business, and that customers like a deal. So they delivered the drugs to people unwilling to come to the rougher neighborhoods where drugs are often sold on the streets; they never carried weapons or fought for turf, and they were willing to offer special deals. The dealers sold only small amounts of black tar heroin in balloons that they kept in their cheeks for easy disposal. Their story of entrepreneurial hard work sounds like most immigrant success stories, except the trade was in opioids.

The opioid epidemic touches nearly every community in the country. The faces of the epidemic include the former football player treating an old back injury, the veteran who returned wounded from Kandahar hooked on pills, and the mother suffering from chronic joint pain. The face of opioid use is also overwhelmingly white and does not easily fit into any one social class. Poor and rich alike are caught in the grip of opioid addiction. As Quinones puts it, "Children of the most privileged group in the wealthiest country in the history of the world [are] getting hooked and dying in almost epidemic numbers from substances meant to, of all things, numb pain."

Behind the epidemic are stories, and Mike Clark, who has spent about 15 years of ministry among those in recovery, has lots of stories. Clark is a pastor at Belmont-Watertown United Methodist Church, 50 miles east of Webster. The stories he tells of addiction and recovery are full of hope and tragedy, and never saccharine or glib. "The army travels on its stomach. Addicts travel on stories," he says.

When Clark was called to the church, it had seen better days. Previous conflicts had fractured the community, leaving behind only a faithful remnant. As Clark tells it, he would finish writing his sermon and look out his office door at all the people descending into the church basement for a recov-

ery meeting. He would smile and wave, and people would wave back.

"There were 35 of us and a thousand of them; they were all in the basement, we were all upstairs, and if anybody was letting anybody use the building, it was the recovery community letting the church use the building."

Clark started "loitering with intent." He served the recovery group cider and cookies at Christmas. He met with people who needed his counsel, and he kept waving a greeting to others. He rarely if ever attended a meeting. He just spent time on the periphery. The folks in recovery started making their way to his office, and then gradually, a few to the sanctuary. In time, the congregation began looking for ways to meet the needs of the community downstairs, wondering how best to be engaged. The eventual relationship "wasn't anybody's idea. So, I kinda think it was God's idea."

Recovering requires honesty, say two pastors who counsel addicts.

Today, the church hosts nearly a thousand people in 23 recovery meetings each week. It also created the 11th step cafe, a take on John Wesley's Class Meeting of 1745. The meeting serves as an important third space—neither church nor recovery meeting—that allows church members and those in recovery to spend time in mutual community. Recently, members of this group began telling their spiritual autobiographies to each other. After one session, a woman said to one of the addicts in the group, "You are all covered in tattoos, I have known you for four weeks, I have already told you things I haven't told my best friends of 30 years. How'd you get us to do that?"

In many churches, avoiding honest talk is one of the fees the faithful pay for entry. Only show your best side, admit only your small sins, hide your dirty laundry, pray for the godforsaken far away, and hide the presence of the godforsaken in your own house—these are often the rules. Congregants are tempted to hide their problems like junkies hide track marks.

Both Clark and Ford say that in confronting the scourge of opioids churches need the courage to be honest. "Recovery meetings demand honesty; they don't work otherwise," Clark says. Honesty is integral to the salvation of the addict. The courage to meet the coming day is always accompanied by a requisite honesty to admit that the disease is never far from you.

Each week the Church of the Reconciliation prays, "God, show us the way to spread your holy word, and give us the means, courage, and stamina to follow it."

The story of addiction in this country is a big and complex story. It is about the lies told to strengthen stigma. It is about the boasts of the arrogant that create division. It is about the craven decisions of the rich to choose profit over support. It requires us to believe that addicts are dangerous and resource-draining and should be marginalized.

Clark says that the addicts he has worked with universally love the story in John 9 of the man born blind. When the man first speaks of his healing, "he begins kind of mealy-mouthed," Clark says, and addicts recognize him. "Oh, he is at his first meeting and he is too shy to talk. Yet, every time he talks, he talks longer, and over time, he becomes bolder. When the story starts he is lying there like a bum and everyone is talking over him. . . . Now he has a voice. And as he talks his voice gets stronger." By the end, the man has claimed his voice and will not let the Pharisees ignore him any longer.

The ministries led by Clark and Ford are testing the hypothesis that sustained and consistent contact will lead to better understanding, deeper compassion, and less fear. Neither Ford nor Clark thinks it wise to compel people to be a part of community, and both want to preserve the boundaries between the church and the recovery meeting. Yet, by pulling the communities closer, the opportunities for relationship increase, and relationship leads to transformation both for the person in recovery and the church member. "It's all about relationships," Ford says with a sigh, "which take a lot of time and energy."

This time and energy might seem wasted when the ministry flounders or the relationships can't seem to grow. Yet ministry to those who live one day at a time requires consistency, sacrifice, and faithful commitment with a long view.

On a stewardship Sunday at Belmont-Watertown UMC, Clark says, the speaker was a person from a recovery meeting that had been meeting in the basement for years. The man told the congregation that this building had saved his life and every day saves his life again. As the man sat down to a standing ovation, he was shaken and a little embarrassed. He asked Clark, "Do they do that for all speakers?" Clark laughed and said, "They haven't given anyone a standing ovation in 90 years."

During the passing of the peace, a member of the church whose grandson had just died from an overdose shook the speaker's hand and said, "If my grandson had known one person like you, maybe he'd be alive." Clark asks, "Where does 15 years of keeping the lights on and waving lead? To these two people meeting in the passing of the peace."

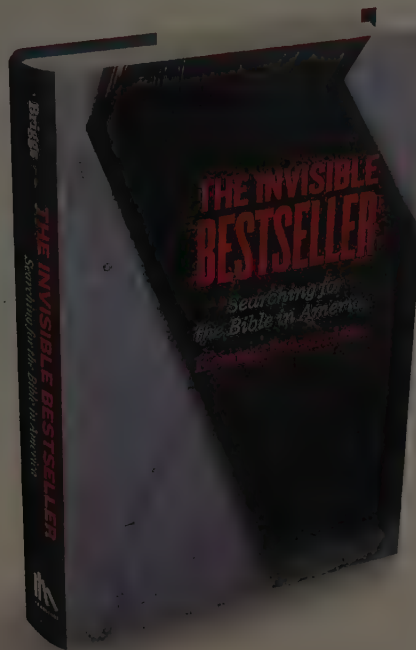
Recovery meetings have existed in church basements for decades, but the

church has been happy to respect the firewall between the recovery meeting downstairs and the sanctuary upstairs. Some of this respect was born of the necessary anonymity required in the recovery meeting. Another reason for the boundary is the tacit assumption that these two communities are fundamentally different. Today, the barrier between the two communities has become more porous, and as addiction spreads, pews are filled with addicts and their families.

"People are being touched by this crisis," said Ford. "The congregation can't look at it as 'those people,' because those people are our people."

CC

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Why Calgary's Hillhurst United Church is growing Evangelically liberal

by Jason Byassee

CAN A CHURCH be both open and inclusive on social questions and at the same time evangelical in outreach and committed to scripture and doctrine? Wouldn't you want to be part of a church like that?

It is not hard to find theologically open churches that aren't engaged with scripture and doctrine. And it is easy to find churches committed to scripture and doctrine that make the lines of belonging impossibly narrow. Could a church offer the best of both worlds?

John Pentland, minister at Hillhurst United Church in Calgary, Alberta, thinks so, and his church seems poised to reach a generation of Canadians who are skeptical of religion in general and Christianity in particular. He admits that this is surprising—those looking for innovative congregations and dramatic church growth are not likely to look at the United Church of Canada.

The United Church started as almost a state church in 1925. It was a merger between Methodists, Presbyterians, and Congregationalists that was ratified by an act of Parliament. The United Church has just over half a million followers. Atheists in Canada number 4.5 million. Recent media attention to the United Church has focused on the “atheist” United Church minister Gretta Vosper in Toronto, whose denunciations of the deity would seem to make her like a scientist who doesn't believe in the periodic table. The United Church has not yet managed to nudge her to other employment.

Pentland arrived at Hillhurst a decade ago when the church consisted of about 50 older people and a handful of children. The board that hired him warned him that they weren't sure they could employ him for more than two years.

Today 450 people worship at two services, and the church is starting a third service and contemplating a building program. HUC has 250 children on its rolls, and between 60 and 100 of them are in church each Sunday. The budget, once south of six figures, is now north of \$950,000.

Pentland says it's better to serve a church that's nearly closed instead of one that still has some strength left. “They're less likely to oppose everything,” he says.

The turnaround at Hillhurst may not be miraculous, and by the standards of more evangelical churches in Canada's larger cities, HUC's growth is only modest. Giant Christian and Missionary Alliance congregations ring Calgary in what's often called Canada's Bible Belt. (With its oil and cattle industries and megachurches, Alberta resembles Texas.) Some colleagues

of Pentland's suggest that anyone can grow a church in Calgary, given its province's greater friendliness to Christianity than is found in, say, British Columbia or Quebec.

Pentland's associate Danielle Ayana James says UC pastors react with jealousy to church growth stories attributed to ministerial talent: “We play whack-a-mole. When someone raises their head, it gets smashed down.” The Hillhurst-Sunnyside neighborhood in Calgary hardly seems inherently friendly to Christianity. It's a hip part of a gentrifying downtown with pubs and pot shops. I saw more Buddhist places of worship than churches.

Pentland describes an early Sunday at HUC when he was robed up, waiting to process into the sanctuary with the choir, and noticed a line forming for brunch at the restaurant across the street. He wondered what it would take for a similar line to form at HUC. He laughed, and then shared his thought with the sparse congregation. They laughed too.

HUC is noted for its ministry to LGBTQ people and to children.

What sparked the change? Pentland ascribes HUC's growth to three factors: its open and affirming ministry to LGBTQ people, its approach to worship, and its children's ministry. Pentland's book *Fishing Tips: How Curiosity Transformed a Community of Faith* (Edge) names several more factors, including HUC's approach to media. Pentland's own quirky genius is surely also a factor.

The United Church of Canada was an early pioneer in the ordination of women, and it moved to ordain gay and lesbian people in 1988—a shift so momentous it was referred to in denominational shorthand simply as “88.” Not every congregation was happy with the move, and HUC was a center of opposition.

Pentland describes an early day on the job at HUC when he furtively slapped a rainbow flag sticker on the front door. He expected it to be taken down, but it wasn't. A board member at the time remembers a giant rainbow flag going up beside the

Jason Byassee teaches at Vancouver School of Theology. He recently wrote *Trinity: The God We Don't Know*.



Photo by Sydney Fream

INCLUSIVE: Although traditional in theology, Calgary's Hillhurst United Church is liberal on social issues and welcomes LGBTQ people. It has grown from 50 to 450 members in ten years.

choir loft. Those moves were made without consultation. But when the board wanted to make the church an official "affirming congregation" in favor of gay inclusion, Pentland slowed things down. Discussion over whether and how to make that move took more than a year. Pentland had an intuitive feel for how fast to move on the issue.

Mainline and evangelical churches in both the United States and in Canada seem to agree on one thing: gay-inclusive churches don't grow. Mainliners assume that doing the right thing for LGBTQ people means folks will leave and churches and denominations will split. HUC shows otherwise. It now has an associate pastor, Pam Rocker, whose title is "Affirming and Creative Coordinator."


Rocker grew up as an evangelical at one of the area's megachurches but found herself on the outs because of her sexual orientation. She summarizes HUC's goal in its affirming ministry with the acronym PIE: "public, intentional, and explicit." The church has brochures describing its ministries to and with LGBTQ people. Pentland speaks proudly of the dozen or so trans people who are part of the community (and tells me he's sorry I didn't get to hear a testimony from one of them on the day I was there). The church advertises events offered by other inclusive organizations in the city as well.

Terry Rock, a lay leader at HUC, describes this as a "wedge" issue: it determines whether a church has integrity when it claims that God loves everyone. LGBTQ inclusion isn't just a matter of checking a box and moving on. It has to be "ongoing, ongoing, ongoing," said Pam Rocker.

And the stance has borne fruit. Rocker spoke of a couple who recently attended the church for the first time. "How did you find us?" she asked. "We saw you in the pride parade six years ago," they said. That kind of fruit is not the fast-growing kind.

Rocker told of a UC church in Toronto where a lesbian woman attended for 12 years but didn't come out until the church officially became an affirming congregation. Only then did she know it was safe. "Conservative churches don't realize they already have gay people in their midst," she said.

On the Sunday I attended, a dozen or more people told me they've only been coming to HUC for a few months. A young woman named Anne said she grew up Anglican but found that HUC matched her progressive values better. The Anglican Church in Canada has actually been out front on gay inclusion, but Anne's presence demonstrated what Rocker means about HUC being out front in a PIE way: the symbols, programming, and staffing at the church make that commitment



*"We start the day with fruit, yogurt,
coffee, and selections from
the CHRISTIAN CENTURY."*

—Arn and Carol Froese

Sterling, Kansas

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LEGACY CIRCLE

Years ago one of Arn's colleagues at Sterling College in Kansas gave him and his wife, Carol, a CENTURY gift subscription. When the subscription ran out, they resubscribed. "I wasn't going to let it go!" Arn says. "Then I gave subscriptions to my kids." Twenty years later, the couple decided to put the CENTURY in their wills.

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unmistakable. Then someone like Anne turns up and calls the place hers.

The second engine for HUC's growth, according to Pentland, is its manner of worship. He doesn't just mean the music, though it's a fine mix of liberal praise choruses (scrubbed of any masculine language and nearly of any singable tunes) and traditional hymns played on the organ. (Pentland calls the music "pretty white bread.") Rather, Pentland is interested in the way that worship can be narrated. In the service, there is no insider language or code or obscure acronyms or naming of people "everyone knows" that newcomers of course don't know.

HUC's worship is what might be called a "teaching liturgy," or what the ancient church called "mystagogy." Everything that is done is explained, opened up for the uninitiated, and marveled at. Pentland's language is always aimed not at the "committed" or the "contented" but at the "curious"—those just outside the church's current reach.

His first words on Sunday echo the mantra on the banner out front: "Whoever you are, wherever you're at, you're welcome on the journey." He repeats that slogan four more times in the first 15 minutes. When folks stand to join the church, he reflects on what's going on: "This is amazing, that in 2016 people join a church." He laments that at a recent ordination service no one said anything similar: "There were nine hymns, Jamaican music, a 52-page bulletin, it took two and a half hours, and no one said, 'Isn't it amazing that in 2016 people would get ordained?'"

Pentland names the challenges the church faces and the surprising ways they are often met. And, as his associate Danielle James puts it, Pentland does all this in a manner best described as playful. When a new member gave a testimony about how good it was to hear from Pentland that it's OK for one's mind to wander in church, the congregation laughed and Pentland deadpanned, with perfect timing, "Sorry, I wasn't listening."

Moments in the liturgy that are often lifeless elsewhere—even in highly liturgical churches—are filled with energy. When Pentland promises the people that they are "healed, forgiven, and set free" by Jesus (another oft-repeated mantra), he tells them to turn and offer peace to one another. "This is our most important work this morning," he said—to greet one another with the peace we've just received from God. During the community's prayers, folks speak up about what they need—an unusual practice for such a large gathering.

One prayer request during worship turned into a ministry—a support group for mothers of kids addicted to video

games. "I never would have thought of it," Pentland said, but one prayer request made it happen.

At the conclusion of the service, people joined to sing the theme song to *Cheers*. I winced a little, but the congregation loved it. It showed another of HUC's commitments—it insists there is no wall between secular and sacred, that churches have nothing to fear from the world, that God is already at work "out there" and in everyone. Pentland leads worship as constant catechesis.

A major engine of the church, Pentland says, is children's ministry, called Kidspace at HUC. The children are in worship for the first 20 minutes and then head to their own classes (a common pattern in Canadian churches). Pastor Sheena Trotter-Dennis leads this ministry and has discovered a number of gifted teachers in the church's midst. Kids who attend often ask their parents if they can come back. Terry Rock, the lay leader and a local politician and business owner, says his daughter demanded that her parents take her to church. "There was a time when we aggressively avoided church," Rock said. Kidspace and his daughter changed that.

In the land of Christendom, people often assume that young adults will come back to church when they have kids, almost by instinct. Observers of post-Christendom know that this no longer happens automatically. HUC makes a significant investment in children's ministry. "We wince when Kidspace is about

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to deliver its budget,” longtime board chair Bryce Paton said—but the church meets the need.

Pentland is convinced most churches come at budgeting the wrong way. “We tend to pay for what we have, instead of what we want,” he said. So HUC funds the areas it wants to see flourish. “It’s a human resources and a programming basic,” Paton said. “But the church often has yet to figure it out.”

Pentland recently baptized a four-year-old who had insisted, “I want the water,” in a way that indicated she expected to meet God there and be changed. Before the baptism, her mother testified that she’d grown up in the United Church and had missed the stories and songs. The girl’s father got up and said: “I’m an atheist, so I feel like a fake here. But what you’re doing makes sense.” The congregation erupted in applause.

“It was our most important baptism in a generation,” Pentland said. He was pointing to the way it combined childlike faith, adult churchmanship, and honest doubt. The sequence of testimonies summoned a favorite word at HUC: authenticity.

Another engine of growth less prominent in Pentland’s talking points but clear in his book is communication. It is rare to find a mainline church whose website and social media presence are not dated in some way. Early on, HUC hired a communications director (it was Rocker, who is now the affirming minister). Its print media is also sharp.

Pentland told of how the church used its sidewalk sign effectively in its pedestrian-friendly neighborhood. An early effort said “Happy Hour 11 AM Sunday.” Rock said that while walking and texting in front of the church, he literally stumbled over a sign that said, “We don’t do guilt.” He went home and told his wife about it.

Pentland is a frequent contributor to the letters section in the local *Calgary Herald* and to Toronto’s *Globe and Mail*—including the morning after the Orlando massacre. A regular preaching feature is a Reel Theology, on the year’s Academy Awards nominees. “People forward those sermons to friends,” he says. “They don’t do that if I preach on, say, forgiveness.”

Pentland contrasts HUC’s media strategy with churches that have their Christmas Eve worship times posted in February or have a sign like the one he saw in Calgary, “Tea and dainties 2 pm”: “Why don’t you just put up that you’re old and boring?” he asks.

This gift for communication isn’t just external marketing. Every Sunday Pentland asks a question and has congregants engage with a neighbor. “What’s a group you belong to?” was the topic when I visited. The woman beside me was a Ph.D. student in philosophy who belongs to a screenwriters’ group working on a film set in Calgary. “I missed the Catholic Church, came for the building here, and stayed for the community,” she said.

A common theme at Hillhurst is that of coming back to the church of one’s grandparents. HUC is housed in a gorgeous old building of the sort that often ends up empty or transformed into a nightclub. But HUC’s building is beautifully refinished, with handsome wood and stained-glass windows. “We look traditional—and that’s a strength,” Pentland said.

Canada’s boomers represent some of the most religion-averse people in North America. But their Gen X and millennial kids have nothing religious to rebel against—except the rebellion itself. A testimony I heard at the church was by a woman named Melissa who told of the Dalai Lama turning away a woman who asked to study with him and urging her to try the faith of her ancestors. Melissa took that advice and started reading the Bible that her Catholic grandparents had read. Then she found the United Church (“which I had never heard of”) so accepting that she jumped in.

“The first sermon I heard was about money. I thought you couldn’t talk about that!” said Patty, a woman who said she’d been attending since January. She said she had practiced Buddhist meditation. “But I’m white, right?” She found her way to HUC and has started to mix Christian teaching with her practice of Qigong.

At the conclusion of the service, worshipers sang the theme song to *Cheers*.

A writer named Robin Galey grew up “new age” and insists she still is “not a Christian, no way.” When she started attending Hillhurst, her mother blanched. “Your grandfather went there,” she said. But Robin loves sitting in the pews where her grandfather once sat. “I’m less of an imposter now,” she said of her weakening irreligion.

For all of HUC’s openness, the sermons are explicitly Christian. Pentland’s sermon on the day I was there was based on the lectionary’s Gospel lesson about the sinful woman who anoints Jesus’ feet.

“This is a story about the body,” he says, drawing out the text’s sensuousness. “To be sensuous is deeper than being sexual,” he said, and called the text a “sabbath of skin.” A God who becomes flesh adores flesh and “takes on our shame about our bodies head-on.” The woman is the prophet in the story more than Jesus is. “Your faith, your faith, *your faith* has made you well,” he quoted Jesus. Faith isn’t a matter of groveling or doing the right things. It’s a matter of seeing that you are beloved by Jesus. Again he used the mantra, “Healed, forgiven, and set free.” This is robustly christological and biblical, even evangelical, preaching. As Pentland said: “This is good news for everybody.”

Pentland has a wiry energy, an edge-of-the-seat seriousness about his preaching, yet he somehow comes off as casual. He loses his reading glasses during worship so often that parishioners deposit new pairs in the offering plate. He doesn’t even take his gum out before church starts. He’s so relaxed that lay people often remark that he speaks off the cuff, saying whatever comes to mind. He actually went back to preaching from a manuscript to make it clear that he does prepare.

Pentland recalls studying preaching with James Forbes at Union Seminary, who threw a volleyball at his head during his first sermon presented in class. “He made me catch and pass

that ball for the rest of the sermon," as a way of teaching him to engage with his congregation.

Pentland is a fan of Richard Rohr and quotes the Franciscan mystic in nearly every sermon. Pentland's criticism of the 52-page ordination bulletin brings to his mind Rohr's comment that we often "hide ourselves in religion." Pentland attends Rohr's workshops in New Mexico as often as he can.

And Pentland has experienced Rohr's "second half of life" category himself. Early in his career his marriage came undone, and he left ministry for three years, working for the United Way. He came back chastened about the impact Christianity has on culture.

"I realized cities are doing just fine without churches," he said, adding that secular organizations raise far more money and do far more civic good. He also came back with a fresh ear for how churchy stuff alienates outsiders. And he is frank about his failures.

Growing churches often have lean administration; shrinking ones are overheavy. Pentland sees his role as finding the right people and then letting them grow into their work. An example is Susan Cooper, whom the church hired as secretary early in his tenure. With Pentland's encouragement, she became a spiritual director, which is the role she occupies on staff now.

When folks who were angry about some of the new things the church was doing would storm into the office, Cooper

would respond as any good administrator should: nonanxiously. But then she would go further: "I was determined to find what had hurt this person," she said. She would pray with the individual and move the conversation from the level of church politics to the more promising ground of spiritual growth.

Cooper remembers one man who huffed that he would "not take direction from a secretary." Pentland had just preached on leaving one's gift at the altar and making amends before praying, so Cooper determined to do that. That led to a breakthrough with the man, who confessed in detail all the hurt in his life. Cooper calls this approach "spiritual hospitality."

For all the talk of how unchurchy Pentland is, he and the church are deeply part of the United Church. The Sunday I attended, Pentland announced a midweek program on climate change: "And isn't this great?" he commented. "The city called and asked if they could come." The founders of the United Church imagined that the church would have a prominent place in public life. At Hillhurst, it does.

Some liberal pastors joke that theirs is the church people would go to if they went to church. They are culturally well positioned to reach those people, but the people aren't interested. Hillhurst United is showing that those folks can be found, invited, and tapped to lead—and that a church for them can grow.

CC

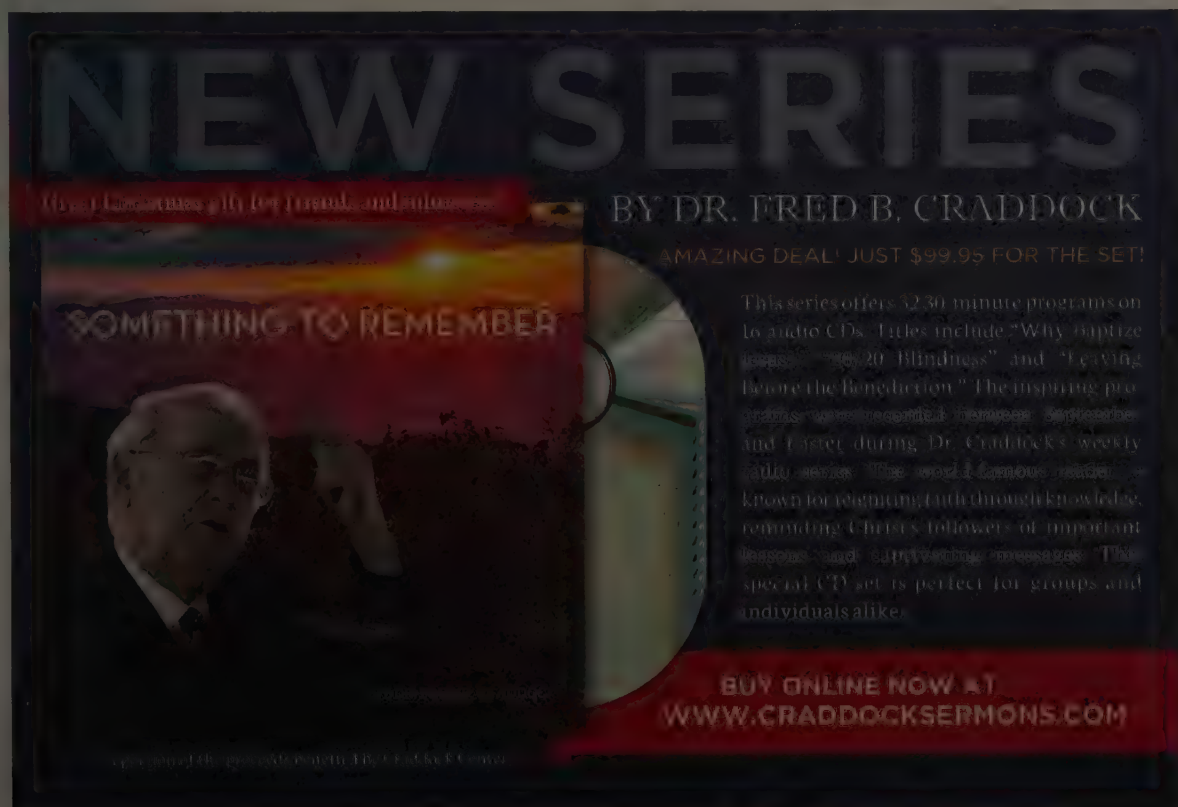
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When pro-lifers were progressives

by David Heim

IN HER FIRST SPEECH after clinching the Democratic nomination for president, Hillary Clinton spoke to one of her core constituencies—supporters of Planned Parenthood. As she reaffirmed her support for legalized abortion, Clinton faulted the critics of Planned Parenthood for being concerned more about prenatal life than postnatal life. “The same politicians who are against safe and legal abortion,” she observed, “are also against policies that would make it easier to raise a child . . . They are for limited government everywhere except when it comes to interfering with women’s choices and rights.”

Clinton’s complaint may not be fair to every opponent of abortion, but she’s mostly right. In recent decades, the voices most opposed to abortion are generally the ones most reluctant to support—much less expand—the health and welfare programs that serve mothers and children.

But it was not always so, says Daniel K. Williams, a historian at the University of West Georgia. He argues that the pro-life movement that emerged in the mid-20th century was at root a liberal one. It viewed protecting the unborn as entirely consistent with New Deal and Great Society efforts to support low-income families. That’s how most Roman Catholics viewed the matter, and the pro-life movement from the 1950s into the 1970s was overwhelmingly Catholic.

Catholic leaders cited church texts against abortion, but they also affirmed church statements on the need to fight poverty and support workers’ rights and a living wage. Williams devotes a chapter to Minnesota Citizens Concerned for Life, a group created to fight any loosening of restrictions on abortion but which had a broader agenda. “The solution to the woman’s problem is neither to offer her abortion, nor merely to prohibit it, but rather to demonstrate that there are humane alternatives,” said a MCCL brochure in 1971. “This means that we must provide counseling, medical care, financial assistance, homes for unwed mothers, adoption agencies, and effective welfare programs.”

Williams is keen to highlight as well the opponents of abortion who joined protests against racial segregation, nuclear weapons, the Vietnam War, and capital punishment. For these activists, the defense of fetal rights was part of an expansive defense of all human rights—a precursor to what later Catholics would call a “seamless garment” ethic of life.

The 1970s proved to be a crossroads. At the beginning of the decade, the pro-life movement counted among its supporters

Defenders of the Unborn: The Pro-Life Movement before Roe v. Wade

By Daniel K. Williams
Oxford University Press, 400 pp., \$29.95

such leading liberal Democrats as Hubert Humphrey and Ted Kennedy. Key figures in the movement were Kennedy’s brother-in-law Sargent Shriver, who had spearheaded the antipoverty efforts of the Johnson administration, and his wife Eunice Kennedy Shriver, founder of the Special Olympics. Black supporters included civil rights leader Jesse Jackson, who argued that the failure to recognize the fetus as a person resembled the

Williams offers a glimpse of a different kind of abortion politics.

failure of whites to recognize the personhood of black people. Leaders of the Black Panthers called legalized abortion part of white America’s attack on the black population. In 1976, a proposed Human Life Amendment to the Constitution, designed to protect life from the moment of conception, was supported in equal numbers by Democrats and Republicans.

In short, abortion in the 1970s was a controversial issue, but it was equally controversial within both major political parties and apart from political ideology.

By the end of decade, the landscape had decisively shifted. The Supreme Court’s 1973 ruling in *Roe v. Wade* made abortion legal nationwide on the basis of a right to privacy. The women’s movement that burgeoned in the 1970s pressed politicians to defend the court’s stance, arguing that anything less would spell a return to the barbarism of back-alley abortions. Pro-life Democrats began to distinguish between their personal opposition to abortion and their public duty to support a woman’s right to choose. The party headed toward that watershed moment in 1992 when Pennsylvania governor Robert Casey was denied a speaking role at the national convention solely because of his opposition to abortion.

On the Republican side, whereas presidents Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford had vacillated on the issue, Ronald Reagan



embraced the antiabortion cause. His election in 1980 and again in 1984 on an agenda of low taxes and small government firmly joined the antiabortion movement to the explicit rejection of the social welfare and antipoverty programs that Humphrey, Kennedy, and Shriver had championed. Meanwhile, evangelical Christians, heretofore largely indifferent to the topic, took up the fight against *Roe* as part of broader resistance to the forces they saw undermining traditional moral values.

Williams provides a valuable, granular account of the politics of abortion, especially the legislative debates before *Roe*, and he offers an important reframing of the history. He begins the story with the Catholic response to the efforts by Protestant and Jewish doctors who, starting in the 1930s, sought to liberalize abortion laws. These doctors wanted to aid their female patients and align the law with actual medical practice. Despite prohibitions, many doctors and hospitals performed abortions for the sake of a mother's health. Loosening legal restrictions was a way to protect doctors from potential lawsuits, offer a safe alternative to the thousands of women each year who risked unauthorized abortions, and save the several thousand who died each year from botched illegal operations. To regularize the practice, some hospitals formed committees to decide which abortions were permitted. Committee rulings varied widely from place to place, however, and were often criticized as too lax or too rigid. Lawmakers began to step in and the political battle commenced.

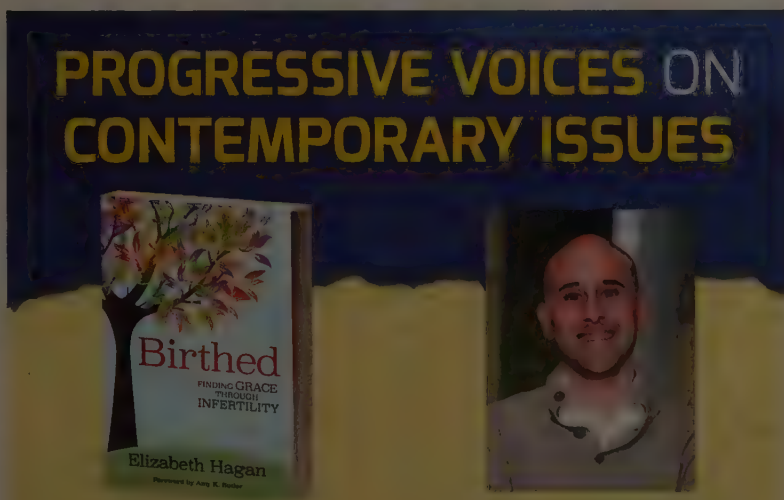
Though Williams does not dwell on this feature, his account of this era suggests some of the difficulties of enforcing rules against abortion. A rule that allows abortion only when it protects "the health of the mother," for example—a stance widely endorsed by the American public—requires considerable interpretation, since medicine is a practice of percentages, not guarantees. At what level of risk is a woman's life or health put in danger? How is health interpreted? And above all, who is to decide these matters? Turning decisions over to a hospital committee was not satisfactory to activists on either side in the 1950s, and it's hard to imagine a similar arrangement being more acceptable in our time. And it would not resolve the political and moral debate.

Following the political realignment of the 1970s, Williams says, the principled opponents of abortion had little choice but to align themselves with the GOP, since only Republicans embraced their goal of prohibiting abortion. But this alliance was painful for those in the movement who still supported antipoverty programs and a broader liberal agenda. For them, the marriage with the GOP was always uneasy.

Williams laments that a liberal center did not hold—that it was not possible to join support for vulnerable unborn children with support for vulnerable families and pregnant women and for other progressive goals. He gestures toward a road not taken, offering a glimpse of a different kind of abortion politics and a different kind of liberal politics.

His argument would be more compelling if there were more evidence of such uneasiness within Republican ranks. What's most striking about the history Williams relates is how quickly the ideological landscape assumed the polarized state we know today, one in which—as Williams readily acknowledges—few politicians would venture to couple an antiabortion stance with opposition to the death penalty, or expanded antipoverty programs, or support for a living wage. For most pro-lifers who shifted to the GOP, defense of the unborn was a paramount issue, and they readily acquiesced to other elements of an increasingly conservative Republican agenda. The only major voice trying to hold together the old liberal consensus was that of the Catholic bishops, as represented by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, and there's no evidence they injected much unease into the GOP.

If the official pro-life movement that emerged in the 1980s showed little reluctance in embracing conservative social and economic policies, it showed even less reluctance in embracing conservative views on gender. The pro-life movement aligned itself with traditional gender roles at the workplace, home, and



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athletic fields, lobbying against Title IX legislation and the Equal Rights Amendment, stances that were anathema to a new generation of liberal Democrats.

By Williams's own account, it's not clear that the liberal professors' marriage with the GOP has ever paid much of a dividend. Opponents of abortion have managed to impose restrictions on access, but the right to abortion has been consistently defended by voters and courts. Meanwhile, abortion rates have dropped significantly in recent years as women have gained better access to education, health care, and contraception—in large part thanks to the social welfare programs that old liberals endorsed and modern conservatives have resisted. Williams cites the words of a Catholic pro-life leader who admitted in 2013 that the best way to reduce abortion rates was to “fight poverty.”

Nevertheless, Williams thinks liberals sacrificed something important in liberalism when they abandoned their opposition to abortion. In his terms, they turned away from the rhetoric of solidarity with the vulnerable and toward a “rights-based individualism” in which individual autonomy trumps solidarity. Williams underplays the ways that rights-based liberalism has been genuinely liberating for women (and men)—not to mention for gay people, black people, Hispanic people, and other minorities. Yet his point still has some force. A liberalism that can focus only on individual rights loses the ability to articulate a communal worldview or appeal to a larger vision of the common good. In the case of abortion, to focus only on the good of individual choice means avoiding talk about what makes a particular choice a good one. The irony for liberals is that on most other issues—such as the environment, gun control, and health

care—they take the opposite view: they think individual rights need to be defined and limited by a broader vision of what makes for a good society.

This book is relevant to mainline Protestants' own effort to fashion a position on abortion. In their official statements, mainline Protestants have tried to straddle the left-right divide, expressing unease with abortion as a blanket right but being unwilling to prohibit it. A statement by the United Methodist Church, for example, speaks of the “sacredness” of the unborn child while admitting there are “tragic conflicts of life with life that may justify abortion.” In a similar vein, the Episcopal Church declares that “all human life is sacred from its inception” and that therefore every abortion has “a tragic dimension” and should be performed “only in extreme situations.” In effect, mainline Protestants have tried to hold on to the lan-

Solidarity with the unborn is a subject that needs to be talked about.

guage of solidarity with the unborn while detaching it from any legal prohibitions. What solidarity with the unborn means is left up to the individual to decide and the religious community to encourage, not the government to enforce.

The language of “tragedy” distances mainline Protestants from the kind of full-throated endorsement of abortion rights expressed by people like Planned Parenthood president Cecile Richards or Katha Pollitt in her book *Pro: Reclaiming Abortion Rights*. Both argue that abortion should be seen as a positive good. Pollitt scoffs at all talk of “tragedy.” Such rhetoric, she says, is simply a way to make women feel ashamed of choosing abortion and to implicitly justify regulations that deny access to abortion.

Hillary Clinton once spoke of making abortion safe, legal, and rare. Of late, the reference to “rare” has dropped out of the phrase, perhaps because it carries a whiff of disapproval. If abortion is good for women, why should it be rare? “Rare” is a vestige of the moral judgment that a society in which abortions are rare is better than one in which they are common. That used to be a sliver of common ground in the debate, but perhaps even that is slipping away.

I sense among liberal Protestants these days a tendency toward silence on abortion. The language of “tragedy” offers no purchase amid the policy options on offer. It seems either mere hand-wringing or, as Pollitt suggests, to play into the hands of a regressive right wing.

Yet if solidarity with the unborn is something mainline Protestants want to inculcate, some kind of speech about it is necessary. Such solidarity is implicit in every ritual of grief accompanying a miscarriage, and every medical effort to rescue a premature infant. Even with the stipulation that solidarity with the unborn is a subject for theological reflection, not state action, it still needs to be talked about. Williams's book might help start that conversation.

CC

The still pilgrim hears a diagnosis

“Multiple sclerosis (MS) is a nervous system disease that affects the brain and spinal cord. No one knows its cause. Onset typically begins between the ages of 20 and 40. Some people lose the ability to write, speak, or walk.”

—U.S. National Library of Medicine

Another blessing. Another gray rain.
All day yesterday it fell and fell.
The sky never changed. It stayed the same.
White grim gray. It was hard to tell
what was cloud and what was light,
what was water, what was sun.
Day slunk slowly into night.
And once again it's begun.
I drove my car to the hospital.
The narrow halls were white grim gray.
The doctor acted cheerful
despite the words she had to say.
I sat beside my grown young son
and hoped for blessing. There was none.

Angela Alaimo O'Donnell

Faith MATTERS

by M. Craig Barnes

What waiting reveals

WE HATE WAITING. We get a lot of practice, but that doesn't make us good at it. We wait in traffic, in grocery store lines, at airports, at the Department of Motor Vehicles, and in doctors' waiting rooms.

Sometimes the waiting is for important news. Will the medical tests reveal a terrible disease? Will we get the job for which we interviewed, or will it go to someone else? Will we ever find intimacy? Will our child grow up to be a responsible adult?

For those who worship, some of the hardest waiting is upon God. There are so many promises in the Bible, and at least one of them has captured our hearts. "Call unto me and I will answer you and show you great and mighty things you do not know." "The one who began a good work in you will bring it to completion." "Go to a land that I will show you, and I will make you a blessing."

This waiting places the credibility of God's promises and our faith in them at risk. But what is faith without risk?

Ernest Hemingway was injured in World War I while working as an ambulance driver. Doctors pulled 237 pieces of shrapnel out of his body, and he spent six months in a hospital ward recovering. He was surrounded by other patients recovering from their wounds and became fascinated by how differently they waited through the seemingly endless days of recovery. Some distracted themselves with small entertainments, others cried out in lament, and still others pondered the depths of their lives.

It may have been during this time that he figured out plot-lines that depicted a lead character waiting for combat to begin, or waiting for a bull to start charging, or waiting for rescue at sea.

Hemingway's thesis is that the waiting does not break us; it reveals us.

This same insight is found in the Bible over and over again. Abraham and Sarah spent 25 years waiting for the child God promised. Moses spent 40 years in the desert waiting for a call from God, and another 40 years in the same desert wandering around until God brought the people to the Promised Land. David had to wait a long time as a fugitive before he could become king. The disciples followed Jesus around for years before they knew who he was and what he was about. Even after his resurrection and ascension they were told to wait for the Holy Spirit before they did anything. The rest of the New Testament depicts all of the creation waiting for the full coming of Christ's kingdom. For that we still wait.

So what is revealed in all of this waiting? The biblical story, which is really our stories, illustrates several revelations.

One of them is that waiting makes us anxious, and anxiety

makes us come up with plans of our own for salvation that are typically not so great. Most decisions made out of fear only make things worse. This is an important reminder for mainline Protestant denominations that realize they're in numerical decline. Maybe God has a new call for our church that has nothing to do with being mainline. We'll have to wait and see.

Another insight is that we're not the only ones in the waiting room of the Great Physician. Many people of various races and national groups have been in the room far longer than we. All of us wait for God's promises of the embrace of justice and peace, but if we start a conversation with someone else in the waiting room, we may learn that we're not the most desperate patient waiting for healing.

Another thing that waiting reveals is that we are creatures and not Creators. If we were gods, we would never have to wait for anyone to make our dreams to come true. But life is created by God. When we lose the humility of this truth we inflict the most harm on those around us. They pay the price as we create havoc trying to self-construct our lives.

Perhaps the most important thing waiting reveals is that we can always choose how we'll respond to the humility it brings.

We can choose how we respond to the humility that waiting brings.

Those with souls filled with gravitas use the waiting to draw closer to the God whose ways are not our ways, and whose timing often seems to have a preference for arriving after the time for saving the day has come and gone.

Is this not one of the proclamations of Easter? The women who stayed near the dead and buried Jesus demonstrated how best to wait. We don't run away. After the waiting has become hopeless, we stay with our grief and our devotion to Jesus Christ. Only then are we well positioned to receive the glorious surprises of a risen Savior who is not done.

The biblical drama seems to indicate that even God is waiting to see what will be revealed in the soul of the church that waits. Will we live by faith, or come up with anxious plans that can only create more hurt?

M. Craig Barnes is president of Princeton Theological Seminary.

IN Review

Waking up the working class

by Lillian Daniel

In a political campaign marked by extremes, the issue of class seems to have turned itself inside out. Union members who supported Bernie Sanders are not necessarily Hillary Clinton supporters—some may turn to Donald Trump in their suspicion of a Democratic Party that has done little for unions lately. “Brexit” and anti-immigrant rhetoric across the globe pit underpaid workers against each other. Can we even talk about a single working class anymore?

Tamara Draut, an executive at Demos, a public policy organization, believes that we can and must. But it’s not your grandfather’s working class: working men in physically challenging and dangerous manufacturing jobs whose unions ensured that they were compensated fairly across the board.

Today’s working class is more female, more diverse, and less likely to work en masse in a factory. They are paid by the hour with little chance for advancement: checkout clerks, salespeople at the mall, hamburger flippers, and janitors. Many of them earn a living taking care of society’s oldest and youngest members as home health aides or child-care providers. They’re seldom protected by labor laws or unions. They may have to ask permission to take a bathroom break. Draut defines the working class as “individuals in the labor force who do not have bachelor’s degrees.” Say what you will about the cost and value of a college education—it’s still the best predictor of occupation and income.

According to Draut, this new working class is a sleeping giant just waiting to wake up, unite, and become a force that could change the nation. “Its sheer scale in size and diverse demographics will shape the future of American politics.” But cur-

rently this giant seems to be asleep at the wheel. How might it be awakened?

The answer depends, in part, on the subjects of Draut’s prior book, *Strapped: Why America’s 20- and 30-Somethings Can’t Get Ahead*. Draut appears regularly on late-night talk shows and news programs, where she taps into the frustration of young college graduates who are disgusted about the state of our nation. Many of these young people were Sanders supporters. They’re organizing unions and fighting for a living wage for themselves and others. Will this group come together with the new ethnically diverse working class?

And even if young labor leaders are on board, what about the Trump supporters who their unions represent? Our presidential campaign has revealed the widespread ethno-nationalism of white workers who think they’ve been screwed. They see people of color not as colleagues and collaborators but as the cause of their problems. Working-class Americans hold vastly diverse views on race and police violence, from Black Lives Matter to the reactionary All Lives Matter. Given this volatile diversity, does anything bind the working class together?

Draut sees possibilities for working-class activism epitomized by the Fight for \$15 movement, which went from “laughable to doable.” Supported by the Service Employees International Union, that movement has pushed cities, states, and even Walmart to raise wages for the working poor. But they still don’t have a union, and the reasons for this are complex.

At its peak, labor represented a third of the nonfarm workforce. It was the Democratic Party’s largest voting bloc, capable of determining elections and set-

SLEEPING GIANT

How the New Working Class Will Transform America

TAMARA DRAUT

Author of
STRAPPED



Sleeping Giant: How the New Working Class Will Transform America

By Tamara Draut
Doubleday, 272 pp., \$26.95

ting the course of the nation. Today, labor is weak and antilabor laws are strong. Many workers’ advocates hoped that the Employee Free Choice Act would facilitate more union organizing in the groups Draut writes about by shielding nascent movements from the campaigns of antiunion employers, which are expensive to fight. But Democratic senators from Walmart-dominated landscapes (and a president who prioritized the health-care fight) allowed the bill to languish without a vote.

Draut admits there is a problem in perception when it comes to the labor movement. Jobs in the United States aren’t as dangerous for the average person as they once were. Technology has made jobs like coal mining safer and the need for unions less obvious.

Still, as a pastor I hear more and more stories about wage theft, something that’s rampant in businesses too small to unionize but large enough to let workers quit rather than pay them the money they are owed. These employees can easily be replaced by other workers, some of whom are undocumented. Draut tells the story of LaShawn, a commercial sanitation driver in Atlanta whose managers routinely clock him out while he is still working in order to avoid paying over-

Lillian Daniel is the author of *Tired of Apologizing for a Church I Don’t Belong To: Spirituality without Stereotypes, Religion without Ranting* (Hachette).

time. Religious leaders and worker centers have played a key role in calling local business owners to account regarding wage theft. Interfaith Worker Justice, a nonprofit organization I've worked with, has drawn national attention to the issue.

But unions still matter. Occasional news stories highlight organizers from unions like UNITE HERE, which fights against international hotel chains and casinos. Such organizing can unite the working class with clergy organizations and even scholars of religion. For example, members of the American Academy of Religion and the Society for Biblical Literature respected a hotel boycott at their 2012 annual conference and subsequently formed a task force on labor policy. (I wrote about this boycott in "Inconvenient solidarity" in the November 1, 2012, issue of the CENTURY.)

When I was a pastor in Chicagoland, I observed citywide protests that resembled the general strikes of the past. Originally led by the Chicago Teachers Union, this vast group now includes transit workers, Fight for \$15 campaigners, anti-death penalty protesters, pro-Palestinian activists, and several distinct branches of the Black Lives Matter movement. These protesters have united across party lines to fight two local friends of the elite: Democratic mayor Rahm Emanuel and Republican governor Bruce Rauner.

I suspect Draut would find hope in a story like that. It hints at the future to which she points: a new working class in America, racially and ethnically diverse, but awakening and uniting to change the course of history.

The Name of God Is Mercy

By Pope Francis
Random House, 176 pp., \$26.00

Dear Pope Francis: The Pope Answers Letters from Children Around the World

By Pope Francis
Loyola Press, 76 pp., \$18.95

As an auxiliary bishop in Buenos Aires, Jorge Mario Bergoglio learned from an *abuela* that "if the Lord did not forgive everything, our world would not exist." From the celebration of his first mass after his selection as pope in March 2013 to the April 2015 papal bull *Misericordiae Vultus* which announced a jubilee year of mercy, Francis has framed his papacy by a theology and practice of mercy.

Mercy, he says, is "the name of God" and "God's identity card." Francis frequently draws on embodied and experiential metaphors to elaborate mercy as grounded in God's creative and redemptive attributes. Quoting Pope John XXIII's opening of Vatican II, he writes that God applies the "medicine of mercy" as a healing balm for the seemingly irreparably shattered heart and incurable wounds of sin—whether original, personal, social, or structural. The divine caress of forgiveness acts as a salvific and sanctifying embrace for which contemporary society fails to

Reviewed by Rosemary P. Carbine, who teaches religious studies at Whittier College in Whittier, California.



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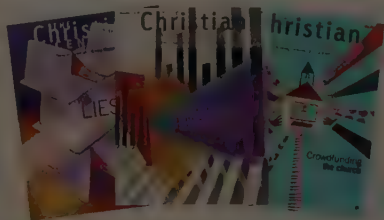


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recognize its need. "The fragility of our era is this too: we don't believe that there is a chance for redemption; for a hand to raise you up; for an embrace to save you, forgive you, pick you up, flood you with infinite, patient, indulgent love; to put you back on your feet. We need mercy." Both divine and human desire initiate and cooperate in this embrace.

The Name of God Is Mercy, rooted in Francis's lifework as a priest and a confessor, cites and interprets New Testament stories to illustrate divine mercy. The woman caught in adultery (John 8) and Peter's forgiveness (John 21) teach us to reform past ways and begin a new life. Other examples include Zacchaeus, the Samaritan woman, and the good thief. The parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15) exemplifies the prodigal grace of God's love and mercy rather than human standards of fairness. Surprisingly, in good feminist fashion, Francis resists Luke's androcentrism (which subordinates and silences women leaders in the early Jesus movement) and instead highlights the example of contemporary mothers and wives who bring food to imprisoned relatives. Like the so-called missing mother of the parable, they bring the nurturing embrace of family and food in acts of mercy.

Francis also uses biblical images of a wayward Jerusalem portrayed as an ashamed and repentant wife (e.g., Ezek. 16), stressing God's fidelity even to the point of forgiving apparently unforgivable sins. He construes these and other stories, such as the legendary calling of the former tax collector Matthew as an apostle, via his Jesuit vocation: "I can read my life in light of chapter 16 of the book of the prophet Ezekiel. I read those pages and I say: everything here seems written just for me. The prophet speaks of shame, and shame is a grace. . . . Shame is one of the graces

that St. Ignatius asks for during his confession of his sins before Christ crucified."

If one reads Francis's theology and practice of mercy alongside prior papal statements, particularly from Paul VI, John Paul II, and Benedict XVI, a new ecclesiology emerges. "The Church's very credibility is seen in how she shows merciful and compassionate love." Resisting clericalist and legalistic models, Francis proposes that the church best shows the mercy of divine creative and redemptive love when it acts as a "field hospital" treating the wounded in triage style. He recounts models of merciful priests "who knew how to be close to people and treat their wounds." To embody mercy rather than judgment, the church must practice "the apostolate of the ear" through listening, patience, tenderness, and being "involved and wounded by pain, by illness, by poverty." In so doing, the church simultaneously shows its maternal face and acts *in persona Christi*. This is a "church that goes forth," with members that "go out from the church and the parishes, go outside and look for people where they live, where they suffer, and where they hope." Here an extroverted ecclesiology and a realized eschatology merge to form a merciful church, conveyed in both corporal and spiritual works of mercy.

Aside from the church, Francis affirms that the family is "the first school of mercy" and "the unwavering reference point for the young." After global Jesuit institutions and volunteers collected more than 250 letters to Francis from children in over 25 countries, Antonio Spadaro, SJ, compiled 30 of those letters and transcribed the pope's responses to them in *Dear Pope Francis*. In his responses to these children's tough questions, Francis touches on theological topics ranging from God, sin and evil, miracles, angels and saints, the Eucharist, and prayer to creation, anthropology, Christology, ecclesiology, salvation, and eschatology—a veritable systematic theology for children. Francis's replies to children's questions about the injustices of poverty, slavery, refugee crises, and war demonstrate that resistance to global suffering combines mercy (imitating God's inclusive love) with advocacy (living hope through practices such as distributive justice).

Far from privatized to personal relationships, Francis's theology of mercy carries political implications. In *The Name of God Is Mercy* he advocates recognizing the religious lives of LGBTQ people, even though his post-synod apostolic exhortation *Amoris laetitia* rejected same-sex unions and parenting as opposed to God's heteronormative plan. He argues for the abolition of the death penalty, the social reintegration of former prisoners, and solidarity with marginalized peoples that flows from the compassion "to suffer with, to suffer together, to not remain indifferent to the pain and the suffering of others." Such compassion involves being moved by visceral love to action and advocacy that addresses poverty, homelessness, and anti-immigration attitudes and policies, and in many other ways counteracts "the globalization of indifference."

Francis's papacy during the first half of this jubilee year of mercy (which began in early December 2015) has been marked by some steps toward such action and advocacy: recognition of the Armenian genocide as an important part of peace and solidarity; condemnation of global IS attacks as offenses against God and humanity; caution against politically divisive walls of fear and hatred that fueled and accompanied the Brexit vote; memorialization of the migrant dead from Central America at a border mass in Ciudad Juarez, a Mexican city also structured by multiple intersecting oppressions that lead to femicide; denunciation of Donald Trump's proposed immigration policies as unchristian; and provision of hospitality at the Vatican to three Syrian refugee families. After the nightclub shooting in Orlando, Francis urged the church to apologize for discrimination against LGBTQ people (as well as all marginalized people, including the poor, women, and child laborers). However, he did not go far enough to mandate reform of either the increasingly commonplace Catholic practice of firing LGBTQ employees after their civil unions or the Catholic teachings that refer to LGBTQ people as objectively disordered. With respect to women, Francis has allowed the use of contraception in Latin American countries affected by the Zika virus (for the protection of children, not as an affir-

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mation of women's sexual agency), endorsed the long-standing church practice of including women in the Holy Thursday foot washing ritual, and formed a commission to study the ordination of women to the diaconate. The commission could legitimize a path for women to sacramental ministry but not to the priesthood and thus not to decision-making power and authority in the church.

Francis's writings on mercy stress a sacramental quality bent on building and deepening human-divine love relationships. On my reading, feminist biblical, New Testament, and theological studies raise important questions and issues about the biblical and Gospel stories that Francis chooses to highlight divine mercy. Francis and his papal predecessors frequently invoke marital metaphors to understand divine-human relations, which map the theological landscape for complementary (read unequal) gender relations in the church, family, and society. Ezekiel 16 problematically posits a marital metaphor between God and Jerusalem to justify the husband's/God's violent retaliatory acts against an adulterous wife/Jerusalem for betraying and abandoning the covenant. God's physically violent acts of judgment are intended to fill Jerusalem with shame for its sinfulness and thus heal the broken relationship. From the perspective of domestic violence, this metaphor describes and prescribes dangerous xenophobic norms about hostility to outsiders which are rooted in the patriarchal control, othering, and abuse (and in this case the graphic injury and murder) of women, particularly strange or foreign women. Francis's grappling with sin, shame, and repentance through Ezekiel 16 does not cohere well with a theology of mercy characterized by tenderness, caress, and healing balm for sin's wounds and expressed in the visceral, womblike character of God's love.

By contrast, the pope's use of the story of the Samaritan woman (John 4) aligns well with his model of a church that goes forth, and together they support his theology of mercy from a feminist theological perspective. When combined with the stories of the Syrophoenician and Canaanite women (Mark 7:24-30; Matt. 15:21-28), Jesus' public conversation with unnamed foreign women counters conventional

religious, gender, and sexual norms. After challenging Jesus to expand his ministry beyond the Jewish community, the Samaritan woman shows her understanding of his identity through personal experience and testimony (much like Mary Magdalene's first witness to the resurrection in John 20:1-18, which Francis recently elevated to a feast day on the liturgical calendar). Resembling the church that goes forth, Wisdom in the book of Proverbs is personified as a woman who speaks in public at the city's crossroads with divine authority, issuing an inclusive invitation to her life-giving table (Prov. 1, 8-9). While this portrait of Wisdom perpetuates the good woman/bad woman dualism, it also provides rich resources for a feminist *logos* Christology in which Jesus' life and ministry are considered a prophetic incarnation of Wisdom. These stories, alongside Francis's ecclesiology, afford both women and men a rich performative, rather than limiting biophysical, way of imitating Jesus, of being the public church.

However, Francis's ecclesiology has

also run into some critical and creative tension with feminist theology, which he recently called a "trap." For example, the Vatican Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life have invited 15 U.S. orders of women religious, including the Sisters of Mercy and Loretto, for further conversation and clarification in the wake of the six-year inquiry and investigation into the mission, life, and adherence to church teaching of U.S. women religious.

Given that the U.S. presidential election is occurring during the second half of this jubilee year of mercy (celebrated until late November), and given that the Nuns on the Bus group recently held its fifth annual bus tour across the United States, Catholics in this country wait with mixed expectations about what Pope Francis will do. The gates of justice (which the chant at the start of the jubilee year uses to refer to the holy door in the Vatican) are open. But they could be opened wider.



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Homegoing: A Novel

By Yaa Gyasi

Knopf, 320 pp., \$26.95

No one forgets that they were once captive, even if they are now free. But, even still, Yaw, you have to let yourself be free." Captivity and freedom find many forms. We may be held in shackles of iron, or imprisoned by invisible bars within our minds. We may know freedom from bondage, from fear, from pain and suffering. We may have the freedom to speak our mind, to be called by our name, freedom to come and go, to learn and grow unfettered by unjust constraints. Yaa Gyasi's sweeping novel explores captivity and freedom passed from one generation to the next, sometimes generously given, sometimes wrested with considerable force.

Effia and Esi are half-sisters unknown to one another. Born in 18th-century Ghana, the two share a mother but little else. Their upbringings, not to mention their adult lives, are vastly different. Effia is given in marriage to a white man, the governor of the Cape Coast Castle, while Esi is captured and sold into slavery, first held in the crowded confines of the castle dungeon. We learn there is a saying about separated sisters: "They are like a woman and her reflection, doomed to stay on opposite sides of the pond." Indeed.

This ambitious novel spans more than seven generations and two continents, following the sisters' descendants as they journey through tribal lands and across vast oceans. Yet the narrative maintains a sharply defined focus, ever mindful of a very real present infused with memories of the past and hopes for the future. The reach of one generation into the other is undeniable as the harsh realities of loss and fear seem to be genetically encoded: fear of fire, of burning to the ground or raging out of control; fear of water, of drowning even on dry land; fear of losing one's self, or of finding oneself.

The prose is at once quietly chilling and hauntingly beautiful. An old woman's scowl is described as "held in place by the hundreds of tiny wrinkles that pulled at her

skin, and her nails had grown so long they curled like talons." The tired feet of a pregnant woman are "so swollen that when she shoved them into her work slippers they folded back out and over, like bread that had too much yeast and could not be contained by its pan." A grandmother's voice is likened to "one of the seven wonders of the world. It was enough to stir in him all of the hope and love and faith that he would ever possess, all coming together to make his heart pulse and his palms sweat."

Recurrent themes echo through the years, inherited from forebears known and unknown. The insistent press of bodies, one against another, whether in the hold of a ship or a tenement apartment. The significant weight of fully feeling and knowing another human being, of acknowledging the other's whole being.

The idea of prayer as an act is seemingly sewn into the day's routine. For instance, Esi's daughter, Ness, prays as she picks cotton, "With the bend, 'Lord, forgive me my sins.' With the pluck, 'Deliver us from evil.' With the lift, 'Protect my son wherever he may be.'" Several generations later, Effia's descendant Akua maintains "prayer was a frenzied chant, a language for those desires of the heart that even the mind did not recognize was there."

The scars imprinted upon broken bodies which hold fast to their integrity create a cartography mapping the way toward wholeness and healing. Some scars are the remnants of physical violence at the hands of cruel masters. Others, inflicted by loved ones tangled in complicated circumstances, cut much more deeply, wounding the soul. This sense of geography is passed from one generation to the next, as courses are charted and direction determined.

As the novel's Marjorie Agyekum discovers, there are those books which find their way under our skin and into our hearts, "the books that she could feel inside of her." *Homegoing* has the capacity to be one such book. It evokes deep pain, and an even deeper sense of hope. It calls upon us all to acknowledge and claim our culpability in the atrocities in our midst. It invites us to feel the fear, harbor the hope, and find our faith in the promise of fusing together past and present in the interest of a future which will indeed allow us to go home, whatever that might look like. Whatever that might mean.

Aging Matters: Finding Your Calling for the Rest of Your Life

By R. Paul Stevens

Eerdmans, 199 pp., \$16.00 paperback

Many readers who are past middle age will disagree with R. Paul Stevens's opening assertion that "we should work until we die." That is, until they read on. Stevens's foundational premise is that God calls us into meaningful work at every stage of our life. "We do not retire from our calling even if we have retired from a career" because "while one chooses a career, one is chosen for a calling." In this way, Stevens reframes the concept of retirement from a Christian perspective.

The work that Stevens thinks we should continue until we die is not the same work we did prior to retirement. Surprisingly, it has the potential to be even better. "Retirement can open up possibilities of work, voluntary or remunerated, that better fits one's gifts, talents, personality, and life experience." Defining work broadly as "energy expended purposively," he draws a picture of retirement that includes purposefully and meaningfully contributing to the lives of others. As we age, we are called to live more than a life of rest and leisure.

At the age of 78, and eight years retired as a professor from Regent College, Stevens acknowledges he is writing in part for himself. He includes a variety of personal examples and regularly cites scripture as a way of integrating his faith with his search for the meaning of work after retirement. But he also writes for the large population of aging Christians who fill pews and pulpits—including those who, like me, are semiretired and zeroing in on their calling for the remainder of life.

I was both challenged and encouraged by Stevens's assertion that "aging as a human experience should be an arena in which we become deeper spiritually." Such spiritual work helps us to know God better, "to go deeper with God, ourselves, and others" and to revel in the joy and

Reviewed by Bob Mink, a retired pastor who teaches biblical studies at Hope International University in Fullerton, California.

Reviewed by Erica Brown, who is a Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) pastor.

delight of being God's child. Contrary to the idea that ending one's work career accompanies a leveling off of spiritual growth, Stevens envisions retirement as a time that is ripe for growth in the life of faith. He offers concrete suggestions to this end, adapting the concepts of vice and virtue to the particularities of aging.

In a chapter titled "The Vices of Aging" Stevens elaborates how the seven deadly sins might uniquely test those who are growing older. An older person experiencing *pride* might refuse to listen to or learn from those who are younger. An aging person might be *envious* of those who have better health, families, and financial resources. Life's experiences might result in an older person having an *angry* heart that leads to frequent verbal attacks on others. For some people the attainment of retirement gives way to *sloth* and boredom. The uncertainty and fear of old age might lead to *greed*. *Gluttony* can become an issue for the elderly when

most of social life revolves around eating. And contrary to what some younger readers may think, the desire for intimacy and affection can turn into *lust* even for the elderly.

Each vice presents a test, but also an invitation and opportunity to grow. Stevens counters the vices of aging by commending the embodiment of the theological "virtues of late life": faith, hope, and love. He defines faith as "abandoning oneself to the support, succor, and beauty of God," noting that "at an age when we are no longer striving to succeed in a career, or when drivenness is reduced, we may deepen our resting in God as our portion, our bounty, and our delight." Hope is particularly necessary for those who are experiencing physical decline and the loss of institutions they once held dear. And as the apostle Paul declares, the greatest of these is love. The challenge and call to love God completely and our neighbor as our self does not cease with aging.

Authors who write about a subgroup of the population face two dangers: relying on inaccurate stereotypes and restricting their readership to a small slice of the population. Stevens's depictions of elderly people and the aging process mostly seem fair and true. What is missing, however, is an acknowledgment that not all aging people are educated believers with sufficient funds for their later years. In his discussion of legacy Stevens provides a solid biblical application for the stewardship of one's estate. But he fails to mention that for many elderly people there is no estate.

Yet the chapter on legacy may be where this book has its broadest appeal. Stevens's discussion of money, stewardship, and God's kingdom is challenging and helpful for Christians of any age. The value of the rest of the book for younger readers may be minimal beyond helping them understand neighbors who belong to older generations. But such understanding is a gift too.



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Intersectionality

By Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge

Polity Books, 224 pp.,

\$24.95 paperback

How we define ourselves and others is complex because we hold multiple identities simultaneously. Social contexts and the resulting power relations (racism, sexism, classism, etc.) "are intertwined and mutually constructing." This book portrays intersectionality as not only an analytic tool used by scholars but also a performative concept—it accomplishes as well as describes. In other words, it is both theory and practice. From the protests around the 2014 FIFA World Cup to "cyberfeminist debates" to hip hop, the authors vividly illustrate how intersectionality shapes people's lives. The implications for social justice are both daunting and hopeful.

Our Hearts Will Burn Us Down: A Novel

By Anne Valente

William Morrow, 384 pp., \$25.99

As the Iraq war rages and President Bush continues a fruitless search for weapons of mass destruction, a brutal school shooting in a suburb of St. Louis leaves four teenagers traumatized. This painfully beautiful novel by Anne Valente, who teaches creative writing in Santa Fe, captures the complexity of human responses to violence. Through the lens of high school friendships and against the backdrop of seemingly ineffective crime scene investigations, Valente poses an existential question: Is it possible for the human heart to burn itself up with grief to the extent that nothing remains? At the edges of the narrative linger the events of the war (bombings, civilians killed, the murder of a U.S. journalist), reminding readers that tragedy's scope is too large for any one person or community to envision fully.

Episodes in hell

In the first episode of HBO's new series *The Night Of*, a young Pakistani-American man wakes up in bed next to a dead woman. Until this point, Nasir Khan (Riz Ahmed), called Naz by friends and family, was a good kid, a college student who worked hard and tried to do right by his immigrant family. But on the night in question, he sneaks out of the house and takes his dad's taxi to go to a party in Manhattan. He never makes it there. Instead, he meets a young woman, indulges in drugs, and spends the night with her. The next morning she is covered with stab wounds. Naz can't remember what happened and flees the scene. Soon the police pick him up and charge him with murder.

The first episode is a painful series of events. Naz is stupid but not evil, and the show effectively creates viewer sympathy for him. I found myself murmuring, "Please don't steal your dad's cab. . . . Don't go off with the girl. . . . Don't take the drugs." After Naz runs away from the scene, his actions cascade into numerous other situations to avoid if you don't want to be falsely convicted of murder.

The sympathy created for Naz presumes his innocence, but *The Night Of* is about moral ambiguity; we viewers aren't allowed to settle into our desire for Naz's absolution. The script provides plenty of other possible suspects, but it doesn't close the door on Naz's possible guilt, not even for himself.

Yet *The Night Of* isn't only an investigation into Naz's possible guilt. It also explores the far-reaching effects of the criminal justice system's involvement.

The process affects not only Naz, but his family and his community.

After the first episode, the series is about Naz's imprisonment and trial. HBO's promotional materials for the show describe this as a purgatory. Naz is in limbo as forces beyond his control swirl around him, deciding his fate. But this is no purgatory, because purgatory is about redemption. In the medieval church, purgatory was imagined as a place where souls went to confront their sin so that they could enter the kingdom of God purified. Pope Benedict XVI has spoken about purgatory as the refining fires of Jesus' love, while Protestants have long envisioned deathbed sanctification taking the place of purgatory. In each case there is still a means by which one might be saved. Naz's prison is no

purgatory. He has no hope of salvation. He has entered hell, not purgatory.

The show does a dark and brilliant job of portraying that hell. The viewer is caught up in Naz's hopelessness. He does not know whom to trust. Even if he's innocent of the murder, prison will make him into a criminal. He chooses to do horrible things to get the protection he needs to survive. Meanwhile the world outside the prison condemns him on the basis of race and punishes other young men who look like him or are, like him, Muslim. His parents can't meet the economic demands of his legal defense and lose their livelihoods and their ties to the community as they try to help their son. The criminal justice system seems intent on condemning him. Even if Naz is innocent, even if he is acquitted, there is no salvation here.



CHAIN REACTION: A series of bad decisions starts when Nasir Khan (Riz Ahmed) drives the taxi that his father co-owns to attend a party in Manhattan.

The author is Beth Felker Jones, who teaches theology at Wheaton College.

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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

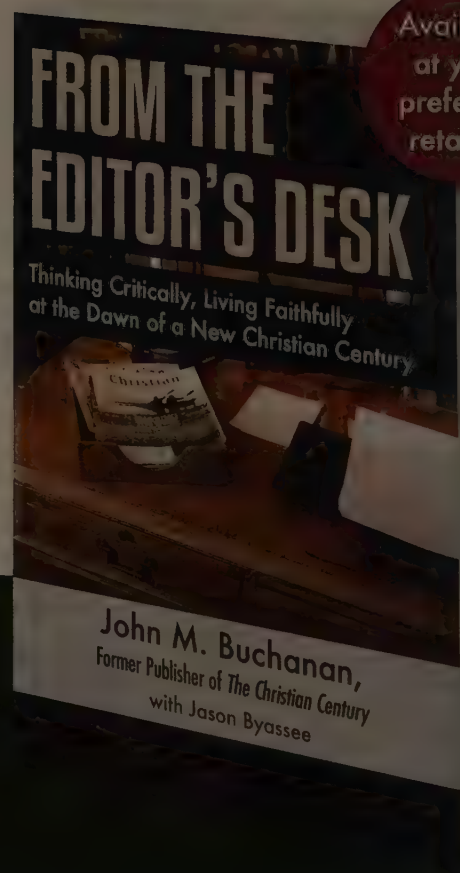
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CHURCH in the MAKING

Taking risks to heal hurt

Where does it hurt?" Civil rights activist Ruby Sales learned to ask this question when she was part of traumatic events during the civil rights movement. Years later, she continues to ask it as a social activist. The question inspired Beth Scibienski. In fact, Scibienski started to understand it as the question that the church should be asking about our culture. As a pastor, the question became a driving force for her public theology and practice.

Scibienski walked through her church's neighborhood and asked, "Where does it hurt?" This led her to other questions. "What is our church's Christian work? What is God calling us to do in the world? What does the community need? What can we fulfill?" She invited her whole congregation to begin asking and listening.

The congregation at Grace Presbyterian Church in Kendall Park, New Jersey, is small and vibrant. Just over a hundred members are on the rolls, and most of the people who attend are between the ages of 26 and 44. In many ways, Scibienski and the congregation reflect the best of Generation X's entrepreneurial spirit. When one of their renters moved out of the building and the church suddenly had empty rooms, they saw an opportunity. They imagined that the space could be another door through which they could connect with and minister to people in their community. They began to understand it as a place

where they could allow God to heal some of those hurts.

As the people at Grace Presbyterian worked toward a robust public theology, identifying the wounds of the culture and needs of the community, the form of their expanded ministry began to take shape. Scibienski realized that many people in her congregation were engaged in healing arts, so she gathered eight of them around a table, and they began to brainstorm. Eventually they constructed a business plan, compiling demographic information, examining market research, and thinking about the people they wanted to serve. Then they crafted the mission statement, planned the marketing, and projected the finances.

Through prayer and conversations, they discerned that they wanted to provide programs and services that enhanced mind, body, and spirit. They would build collaborative relationships with individual practitioners, organizations, and businesses by talking with psychotherapists, massage therapists, Reiki healers, and others. They'd involve those who led yoga classes, healing circles, meditation, spiritual direction groups, bereavement conversations, and drum circles. They dreamed of hosting concerts, open mic nights, and workshops. They imagined theater groups for children with autism and sports camps for people with disabilities.

One thing they didn't want, however, was a high-end meditation center that would only be accessible to wealthy clients. Instead they were determined to reach out to those who were underserved and overlooked.

The dream became almost a part-time job for the eight people who had gathered around the table. Three years ago they opened the Sand Hills Community Wellness Center. They refurbished administrative rooms into a yoga studio, a psychotherapist's office, and a space for Reiki healing. They use their green space for a community garden and partner with the community kitchen. They provide classes on how to cook healthy foods and serve community meals. They partner with a creative writing group and host a journaling women's retreat that helps women get past anxiety so that they might live creatively.

Most of the practitioners and counselors are not from the congregation, but they commit to Grace Presbyterian's vision of the Wellness Center. The practitioners have low overhead, and they in turn invest in the community through donated work, sliding pay scales, and program scholarships.

Scibienski admits that creating the Wellness Center has

not been easy and says it can't be the last-ditch effort of a dying congregation because it takes more energy than a fading congregation can muster. Scibienski confides, "This is really scary work. I was trained in one vocation, so why do I think I can be a business owner? I feel vulnerable." She realizes that her worshiping community looks nothing like the congregation of her childhood. Reflecting on the ideal church of the 1980s, she admits that "I had to accept that loss."

Yet when Scibienski doubts or gets nervous, she remembers that the church has a long history of starting hospitals and schools. She imagines that congregations must have overcome similar worries when they started their preschools, but running a preschool in a church is now common. "We want to provide positive things in the world," she says.

The difficulties and bumps in developing the church and the Wellness Center have not stopped Scibienski from imagining other possibilities. Now she dreams of providing housing for families with disabilities and seniors. Clearly, Scibienski is still asking, "Where does it hurt?" She is still listening for the answer, and she is still longing for God to use her as a force for healing.

Carol Howard Merritt is a founder of UNCO, an "unconference" for church leaders, author of Tribal Church, and cohost of God Complex Radio. Her blog is hosted by the CENTURY.

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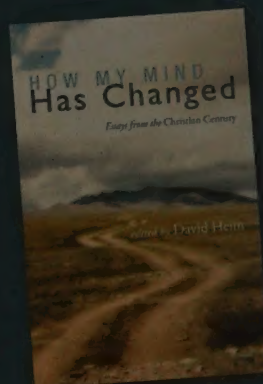
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Crucifixion, by Giovanni Stradano (1523–1605)

Giovanni Stradano, a Flemish artist who moved to Florence to study Italian art and culture, followed the style of Mannerism taught by Giorgio Vasari. The renovation of the Santissima Annunziata, which included Stradano's altarpiece *Crucifixion* (1569), was part of a citywide project to modernize chapels and reemphasize the teaching of biblical stories through art. In this painting, Jesus turns away from the criminal on his left, who looks into the darkness in defeat and despair. Jesus turns to the repentant thief and says, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). The painting is rich with other symbolic elements. The skeleton at the foot of the cross represents Adam, who is redeemed by Christ's death. The dog in chains represents Satan and the anti-God powers now defeated by Jesus' sacrifice. Among the painting's Mannerist features are elongated proportions, contorted body positions, and use of bright yellow and orange colors in the fabrics.

Art selection and commentary by Heidi J. Hornik, who teaches in the art department at Baylor University, and Mikeal C. Parsons, who teaches in the school's religion department.

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